

# OPTIONS FOR STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF LIIT (AESL)

## BACKGROUND

AESL / “Liit” (Australian Association of Estonian Organizations) was established in 1952, as an umbrella organization for Estonian organisations in Australia.

The structure at the time agreed that Liit would convene as a group once each year, with matters in between being handled by the Liit Committee. This Committee would operate on a three-year rotational basis. i.e. based in Sydney for three years, then Melbourne for three years, then Adelaide for three years. This was quite sensible at the time, due to communication systems in those days. It also allowed for some continuity with the Committee remaining in one city for three years at a time. It also ensured that there would be, over time, a spread of management across the three main states and active cities in Australia.

Concerns have been raised in recent times as to whether this is an appropriate model any more in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the Committee passes from one city to another, much of the thinking gets lost as the personnel change.

Times have changed – we now have email, electronic conferencing options via phone, Skype, etc

When the AESL Committee was based in Sydney from 2015-2017, work was progressed towards getting AESL incorporated. This issue was again raised at the AESL Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 31 December 2018 in Sydney.

The discussion also considered a restructure of AESL and possible changes. One suggested change was to combine activities and governance with the ERC (Estonian Relief Committee Ltd) in some way, to reduce workloads and the numbers of committees with overlapping functions.

During discussion, it was proposed that these changes should be considered prior to the actual legal steps of incorporation or similar (e.g. becoming a Limited company).

This AGM of 31 Dec 2018 also asked people & members to propose any changes, and these were to be sent to a committee comprising Dr Juho Looveer and Tiiu Salasoo.

A notice to this effect was placed in Meie Kodu in January 2019, with responses due in March 2019. Unfortunately, no responses were received.

No further movement appears to have occurred during 2019 with regard to a restructure of AESL or merging activities with ERC, apart from some comments in AESL Minutes and emails circulating these.

One such email suggested that perhaps AESL should fold as it is, handing over all responsibilities to ERC.

AESL membership has been in decline for some time, with most current members being from NSW.

The viability of AESL is also in question, as it is due to move to Adelaide at the end of 2020.

The Estonian World Council (UEKN) has as its members the umbrella organisations of the bigger Estonian expatriate communities, ie Canada, USA, UK, Sweden, Germany, Australia and Russia, and the main Estonian societies in Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and the Czech Republic. Australia is one of the earliest members.

The current Estonian government has formed a committee of representatives from Sweden, Canada, USA and UEKN as well as Estonian politicians and public servants. The aim of this committee is to enhance relations between Estonia and its expatriate communities. Questions to be resolved are, amongst others, the question of support for Estonian newspapers, Estonian Houses, and dual citizenship.

However, to be part of this movement and to be eligible for funds, Australia must have an umbrella organisation that looks after the interests of the Estonian community in Australia in general, and hence needs a broad membership. Currently this project being pushed by Canada and Sweden but through UEKN Australia can also have input.

If AESL is abolished, that would leave Australian Estonians without a voice in expatriate affairs.

Hence, it is important to consider the structure and operations of AESL urgently, so that it can become an effective ongoing group that does represent the diaspora of Estonians and Estonian groups across the country.

This MUST be done within a short time frame, e.g. discussions, decisions, planning, etc all to be done during 2020, and all necessary motions and changes to be enacted at the Annual General Meeting proposed for 31 December 2020.

To be effective, it is suggested that a working committee be established to consider, among other issues:

- Purpose of an overarching body
- Functions
- Liaison and sharing of responsibilities with other bodies (e.g. ERC)
- Proposed membership
- operations
- Proposals for structure, constitution/guidelines,
- Formal and legal issues to effect necessary changes

A discussion of some options for the structure of a future body are considered in the attached pages

**PROPOSAL** from ERC / ECFA:

That AESL form a Committee to consider the purpose, function and structure of the future AESL, and to review any previous work in this regard.

This Committee report back to AESL by 31 May 2020

ERC has some nominations for such a Committee , should this proposal be agreed to.

Dr Juho Looveer

Secretary, Estonian Relief Committee Ltd // Estonian Cultural Foundation of Australia

December 2019

## Model 1: Rotating Executive (e.g. current model)

Description: Liit consists of its members/constituents, who determine policies and make major decisions at General Meetings as called (Annual General Meeting once a year; Extraordinary General Meetings as deemed necessary). Annual budgets, operating expenses and other major decisions will be determined or ratified at the AGM.

The Executive will manage affairs day-to-day,

**The Executive will be appointed all from one city (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide) for a period of three years. After a three-year term, the executive will be located to the next city**

Structure: Members will be organization who are fostering, maintaining, developing Estonian culture and policies.

To be a member, the group must have at least 20 (?financial) members; must be active (i.e. hold at least four meetings or events in the year)

This could include Estonian Societies around Australia; Estonian House Co-Ops (?); cultural groups (e.g. choirs; dancing groups, ); Estonian based church groups (?); sporting groups; fraternities and sororities; war veterans, etc; language development groups and schools, including groups looking after childrens' activities;

[NOTE: this is more expansive than the current AESL membership, and would need discussion]

<u>STRENGTHS of this model</u>	<u>WEAKNESSES of this model</u>
Ease for Exec to get together regularly	
	The Exec could be too city-centric in their thinking
	People not living in the three key cities may never be included or involved in the Executive
	Key people may not be included for a period due to not being in the current Exec location
New people get initiated to the Executive every few years	
	Break in continuity every three years, and a year of getting used to being the Executive, and working out what to do, how.

**Model 2: Parliament for Estonians in Australia** (similar to model in Canada)

Description: Liit consists of its members/constituents, who determine policies and make major decisions at General Meetings as called (Annual General Meeting once a year; Extraordinary General Meetings as deemed necessary). Annual budgets, operating expenses and other major decisions will be determined or ratified at the AGM.

The Executive will manage affairs day-to-day,

**The Executive will be elected as the 9 people from across Australia garnering the most number of votes. One third of positions will be up for election each year**

?? will the Exec personnel be elected by the member groups at the AGM? Or by Estonian individuals affiliated with AESL members?

Structure: Members will be organization who are fostering, maintaining, developing Estonian culture and policies.

To be a member, the group must have at least 20 (?financial) members; must be active (i.e. hold at least four meetings or events in the year)

This could include Estonian Societies around Australia; Estonian House Co-Ops (?); cultural groups (e.g. choirs; dancing groups, ); Estonian based church groups (?); sporting groups; fraternities and sororities; war veterans, etc; language development groups and schools, including groups looking after childrens' activities;

[NOTE: this is more expansive than the current AESL membership, and would need discussion]

<u>STRENGTHS of this model</u>	<u>WEAKNESSES of this model</u>
Continuity of personnel and thought	
No major changes in Executive each year	
Allows for the "best" people to be at the core of activities.	
Could allow for better continuity of thinking, international relations, etc	
	Less opportunity for newer people to become involved
	Could become a stagnant group of "elders" – i.e. difficult for new people to get involved
	"Group Think" – resistance to ideas from people not in the Executive

### Model 3: Representational model

Description: Liit consists of its members/constituents, who determine policies and make major decisions at General Meetings as called (Annual General Meeting once a year; Extraordinary General Meetings as deemed necessary). Annual budgets, operating expenses and other major decisions will be determined or ratified at the AGM.

The Executive will manage affairs day-to-day,

**The Executive will consist of two members from each of NSW, Victoria, South Australia, plus one member from each of Queensland, ACT, West Australia, Tasmania. However, to have delegates, the state must have an active community and be proper members of their state organisation.**

Structure: Members will be organization who are fostering, maintaining, developing Estonian culture and policies.

To be a member, the group must have at least 20 (?financial) members; must be active (i.e. hold at least four meetings or events in the year)

This could include Estonian Societies around Australia; Estonian House Co-Ops (?); cultural groups (e.g. choirs; dancing groups, ); Estonian based church groups (?); sporting groups; fraternities and sororities; war veterans, etc; language development groups and schools, including groups looking after childrens' activities;

[NOTE: this is more expansive than the current AESL membership, and would need discussion]

<u>STRENGTHS of this model</u>	<u>WEAKNESSES of this model</u>
Broad representation from all states	
	Could end up with the same 1 or 2 people from one state staying on too long. This would obviate any generational change and could stymie any influx of new thinking
Could allow for better continuity of thinking, international relations, etc	

## Model 4: Delegational model

Description: Liit consists of its members/constituents, who determine policies and make major decisions at General Meetings as called (Annual General Meeting once a year; Extraordinary General Meetings as deemed necessary). Annual budgets, operating expenses and other major decisions will be determined or ratified at the AGM.

The Executive will manage affairs day-to-day,

**The Executive will consist of one person nominated by each member organisation**

Structure: Members will be organization who are fostering, maintaining, developing Estonian culture and policies.

To be a member, the group must have at least 20 (?financial) members; must be active (i.e. hold at least four meetings or events in the year)

This could include Estonian Societies around Australia; Estonian House Co-Ops (?); cultural groups (e.g. choirs; dancing groups, ); Estonian based church groups (?); sporting groups; fraternities and sororities; war veterans, etc; language development groups and schools, including groups looking after childrens' activities;

[NOTE: this is more expansive than the current AESL membership, and would need discussion]

<u>STRENGTHS of this model</u>	<u>WEAKNESSES of this model</u>
Executive will represent the interests of its members	
	Difficult for new people to get involved.
	Focus could be on current members and activities, and hence exclude any new groups

## Model 5: Composite Model – Elected Persons plus State delegates

Description: Liit consists of its members/constituents, who determine policies and make major decisions at General Meetings as called (Annual General Meeting once a year; Extraordinary General Meetings as deemed necessary). Annual budgets, operating expenses and other major decisions will be determined or ratified at the AGM.

The Executive will manage affairs day-to-day,

**The Executive will consist of:**

- .. - **5-7 people elected by members on their own merits**
- plus two members elected or appointed from each of NSW, Victoria, South Australia, plus one member from each of Queensland, ACT, West Australia, Tasmania.**

Structure: Members will be organization who are fostering, maintaining, developing Estonian culture and policies.

To be a member, the group must have at least 20 (?financial) members; must be active (i.e. hold at least four meetings or events in the year)

This could include Estonian Societies around Australia; Estonian House Co-Ops (?); cultural groups (e.g. choirs; dancing groups, ); Estonian based church groups (?); sporting groups; fraternities and sororities; war veterans, etc; language development groups and schools, including groups looking after childrens' activities;

[NOTE: this is more expansive than the current AESL membership, and would need discussion]

<u>STRENGTHS of this model</u>	<u>WEAKNESSES of this model</u>
Includes people with special strengths, contacts, etc	
Includes representatives from member states	
	Large group for full meetings
	Perhaps the elected people could form the executive, to handle day-to-day issues; and the delegates take part in monthly or regular meetings (? Quarterly), peruse minutes, set general directions, etc
Allows for continuity of ideas, contacts, etc	
Directions set to suit members	
More likely to have some ongoing change	



- For all models considered, perhaps other principles should also be included
  - e.g. one third of the executive should be up for re-election every year, on a rotational basis.
  - e.g. no person to serve on the Federal Executive for more than 7 consecutive years; then a mandatory two year break before assuming a position again. This could perhaps be overruled by a general vote at a General Meeting in exceptional circumstances if there are no alternate candidates

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