

Note of Oxfam Australia Board Meeting – 5 April 2019

The Oxfam Australia (OAU) Board met on Friday 5 April with two absent members expressing regrets. This was one of the two Strategic Session meetings in each year, substantially given over to subjects that are likely to be significant for Oxfam over the long term.

At the commencement, the Board was fortunate enough to receive a briefing from the Country Director, Sri Lanka, who was in Melbourne and presented a number of highly innovative approaches that are being implemented in Sri Lanka, where OAU is Executing Affiliate.

The meeting started with an in camera discussion about the implications of and response to Helen Szoke's intention to retire as Chief Executive (CE) in August this year. The discussion covered the need for stability and continuity, an efficient and smooth process for recruitment and transition to a new CE, and what Helen's news means for OAU governance.

The Board received the CE's report on OAU's activities and performance, commencing with an update on operations and the external environment. She covered the looming election and implications for DFAT funding, financial matters including budgetary parameters and objectives for 2019/20, provided an update on programs, the status of the leadership restructure, and a debrief on the recent Oxfam international meetings in Kenya, which the chair had also attended and commented on. There was further discussion about possible changes in approach to Oxfam's positioning in the Pacific. This is an area of strategic importance to OAU not only in geographic terms but also because poverty, justice and gender are very much live issues in the Pacific.

At this meeting, the Board discussed trading operations and performance at length and confirmed the recommendation that Oxfam Australia Trading be wound up by 30 June 2019. The Board recognised the import of this decision from every point of view – staff, volunteers, producers, supporters and the decades of history that lies in our shops and other trading channels – but affirmed this was the correct step to take in light of all circumstances, particularly the extreme challenges facing retail in Australia and which are expected to remain the case.

In the meeting, the outputs of board committees were discussed and matters agreed, including recommendations of the Remuneration Committee and Governance Committee. On the advice of the latter, the Board activated the Board Nominations Committee to examine board membership matters, ratified adoption of a strong, up to date Child Safeguarding Policy that will also be implemented across the Confederation, and noted Oxfam's adherence to refreshed ACFID safeguarding codes and standards.

With formal board business complete, the Strategic Session commenced and ran for the rest of the meeting. The Session was on the theme of Changing Design and Governance for Oxfam in Australia and across the Confederation and implications for the OAU Board's future governance responsibilities.

Dennis Goldner
Chair
April 2019