

ASC AGM – Commodores Report (2025–26)

This report summarises the year under the five strategic focus areas of the club: Membership Growth, Volunteers, Participation, Facilities and Finances. Our facilities and finances remain strong and have improved over the past few years. Whilst the total number of volunteers has decreased, the effort from our volunteers over the last 12 months has been strong. However, membership growth and participation on and off the water have not advanced over the last 2–3 years and need a whole-club focus (not just the Committee) to address this.

Membership Growth

Membership growth is still our biggest challenge. Whilst we have had two Discover Sailing days, there have only been a handful of new members joining. Because of this, and several of our older members moving away from the club we have seen a drop of nearly 20% in overall member numbers, including family members, over the last two years.

The majority of our new members did not stay with us longer than 2 years. This appears to have been due to factors including: people finding they were not suited to dinghy sailing; people not prepared to purchase and maintain a boat; and our club's ability to train and then mentor new members to build their confidence to a point where they want to continue sailing with the club. A primary constraint is the availability of trainers and members to provide support. Given Rod and Don have had to pull back from providing training and mentoring we have shifted our approach so new adult and teenage sailors can do their initial learn-to-sail with the Albert Park Boatshed next door.

There have been approximately monthly learn to Sail programs of 4 sessions available through Albert Park Boatshed. To date we have had 8 or so new members undertake these programs. Geoff Saliba has been conducting Better Sailing Sessions on 1 or 2 Saturday mornings per month with classroom and on water components. These have had a mix of newer members sailing their own boat, or club Pacers or Zest boats.

We also purchased a tablet device so when people wander over on a Saturday, we can talk them through membership and, if they're keen, they can join on the spot. We're also working on a simple one-page guide/brochure so any member can confidently explain how the club works, what people need to get started, and who to talk to.

Since the start of the year we've had some discussions with Navy Cadets (Melbourne Branch, now based in Surrey Hills, and potentially the Dandenong group). They're working through their internal processes, but the idea is they could bring cadets (and possibly families) down a few times per year for sailing, which may help grow our membership.

The club still has work to do on how we bring new sailors in and support them, and how we can be more active with promotion and word-of-mouth. If you have contacts (schools, community groups, workplaces, friends) who might be interested in giving sailing a go, please discuss with a club flag officer how this could be advanced.

We have recently reviewed membership fees. After working through a proposal from Geoff Saliba, the Committee decided to align our fees with APYC and help optimise the likelihood of new members joining our club. In doing this the intent was that any new sailor joining the club between now and September would be on the new fees, and all members would have

their fees adjusted in September. We are also looking to hold off on a CPI increase at the September renewal, noting we have sufficient funds in reserve to do so.

Volunteers

Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time across the year. While there has been some decrease in the total number of volunteers, the effort from those who have done so has been strong and has made a real difference across racing, training, events, communications and maintenance.

Special thanks

Special thanks to members who have contributed significant time and leadership this year. In particular: Cindy Tilbrook for ongoing Committee work and race officer work, particularly for the Top of the Lake Regatta; Tim Falkner for carrying the Secretary role; and Rod Thomas for his leadership as Rear Commodore and continuing on the Committee. I also acknowledge Don McKenzie for his training support and mentoring built up over more than 30 years; and Jack Woods for secretarial support and helping drive a stronger focus on policies and good governance.

Thank you also to all Committee members and the many volunteers who helped with race management, coaching support, events, communications, and day-to-day jobs around the club and yard including race management, management of the tower and running the galley.

Awards and recognition

At the Australian Sailing Victoria Awards in September, Rod Thomas received the Lifetime Achievement Award for his services to Albert Sailing Club and the Mirror Class Association. Luke Tupper received Official of the Year for race official volunteering, including organising and umpiring Victorian Schools Sailing.

Volunteer roles needed

We have had a good number of nominations for Committee this year. A key gap is the club Secretary—volunteers are encouraged to come forward for this critical role (which primarily covers Committee meeting minutes, correspondence and policies). We also need a Club Captain to assist the Rear Commodore with our sailing activities and a couple of new general committee members. Outside of the general committee volunteers would be welcomed to in areas including club maintenance, social media communications, online web and database functions and social activities.

If you have availability for a general committee role or can assist in other ways please discuss your involvement with me, Jaimie Wilson or John Capewell.

Participation

Sailing

Club racing was conducted on Saturdays throughout the year with the Winter Season from May to August and Summer Season October to December. Fleet sizes varied according to people's commitments and weather conditions, with a number of stronger wind days in Spring.

The lake water level was at or not far from maximum from June to December, great for sailing. The water level deteriorated from late January with the inner Melbourne area experiencing below average rainfall, such that sailing with partially raised centreboards has

been required.

There as a successful annual Top of the Lake Regatta in June, with seventy boats across the two days. The largest fleet was the junior Optimist sailors which included some young sailors in their first Regatta.

Another highlight was the VIODA Optimist class Winter Coaching program on Sunday afternoons. Forty junior Optimist sailors were out on most of the Sunday afternoon sessions. The 2026 program covers 10 Sunday afternoons from mid-May to the end of August.

The extended F1 Grand Prix Race period effected our sailing in the late February to mid-April period. Most of the Park was closed and no vehicular access was possible for this period. Due to lobbying with the local State MP and the AGPC we were able to negotiate sailing in the northern half of the Lake and walk in access to the Sailing Precinct area in weeks 1 and 3 of the 3-week Race Period in 2026 and subsequent years. Members of ASC and APYC had short course racing on the two Saturdays, with roughly 2/3rds of fleets normally expected at this time of the year, the peak time for sailing in Melbourne.

Participation on and off the water has been steady but has not advanced over the last 2–3 years. We typically see between 5 to 20 ASC boats on the water for Saturday afternoon club races depending on the weather. We also have around 10 to 15 members who sail casually on the weekends or a few midweek. To be sustainable we need to encourage more current members to get our sailing and attract and support the sailing of new members.

The next 12 months are looking challenging for sailing on the lake if current weather predictions, for El Nino weather conditions to arrive in the second half of 2026. If Melbourne experiences significantly below average rainfall for the remainder of 2026 the lake water level is less likely to return to full depth, which we have usually enjoyed in the winter and spring months.

Social events

We had a great Christmas function and our annual trivia night in September went well. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of club members to making these events happen, particularly John Capewell, Bettina Azzopardi, Gai and Rowley Bourke, and Lisa McCrae. The next ASC Trivia night will be on 1 August. Put this in your diary. We look forward to a good attendance by ASC members.

Separately, we had a couple of social sailing days and some after sailing BBQ's, which were all well attended. Thank you to the members who organised, set up, ran activities and helped pack up on the day—these events make a big difference to connection across the club.

Facilities (club room information)

The club had regular contact with Parks Victoria on a range of issues across 2025-26. The primary focus has been on the renewal of the ASC lease for a period of 10 years, to 2035, with a modest rental increase, rather than the significant increase in rental which was initially proposed. This was approved in December of last year. I thank Cindy in particular for her hard work in pulling together the key material over a two-year period. Other areas of focus during the year have been: cutting of aquatic vegetation in the Lake; the changes to the AGPC Act; a proposal to upgrade the edges of the lake; and updates on works occurring across Albert Park Lake.

Clubroom and facilities improvements this year included boat repairs, removal of waste materials, general tidying, a refresh of the change rooms (repainting and refitting, largely led by Rowley), cleaning of the lakeside wall, gutter cleaning, and behind-the-scenes work on the website.

Looking ahead, Ian Coleman has developed draft drawings for a change to the upper level of the clubhouse, to create two office/storage rooms adjacent to the bar (through to the stairs) and potential bar widening. The club committee will need to consider when and how best to advance such development. It would be a first step to move items out of the Tower and support longer-term planning (including the possibility of a lift, noting this would require a significant government grant).

A Building Committee (initiated by Cindy Tilbrook, and handed over to me) is progressing a number of initiatives over the next 6–12 months, including:

- 1) Installation of a second handrail on the stairs up to the upper level of the clubhouse
- 2) Acquiring a television on a stand that will be placed inside the foyer doors and include videos of club racing, details of the Committee and how to contact the club.
- 3) Installation of a large photo or motif on the outside of the boatyard wall, adjacent to the clubhouse.
- 4) We are looking to get a design for the Committee Room under the tower to install some double doors into the foyer and a window on the lakeside of the room. Once we have a design we will look to see if we can obtain funding from the annual Parks Victoria grant.
- 5) We are looking at how we could install a solid wall along to the toilets from the foyer, along with clear signage indicating where the toilets are.

Finances

Financially, the club remains in a strong position and continues to hold healthy reserves. There are risks and challenges on the club's revenue side which will need to be carefully managed. Our reserves put us in a good place to fund priority premises and clubroom improvements when required, while also giving us flexibility over the next few years as we work to rebuild membership and participation. It also supports the Committee's decision to consider holding off on membership fee increases at the membership renewal in September.

Conclusion

Finally, thank you to the 2025/26 Committee for the time and leadership provided this year. The Committee has kept the club running smoothly while also progressing several important strategic and operational priorities, including:

- Preparing and submitting grants, including successful funding for a new RHIB to replace the old red boat.
- Maintaining strong financial oversight (weekly income/expenditure and banking), contributing to a positive year and a strong overall financial position.
- Strengthening club governance and administration (correspondence, agendas/minutes, policies, insurance and external licences).
- Keeping members informed and engaged through communications (enquiries, Thursday Snippets, website/Facebook updates and Mudpuddler).
- Ongoing maintenance of buildings, club powerboats/training boats and equipment.

The club is in quite a good position at the moment, but we need to actively pursue new members because we are approaching the limit of not having sufficient volunteer members.