ZONTA INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT 23

BUILD A BETTER WORLD FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

DISTRICT 23 RESPONSES TO ZONTA INTERNATIONAL BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE.

Prepared by D23 Governor Wendy Quinn October 28th 2026

Process: The 2026- 2028 D23 Board met face-to-face for the first time in August 2026 and discussed the requirement to provide feedback to the Zonta International *BluePrint For the Future* proposals by the end of October. The D23 Board agreed to decentralise the approach for eliciting feedback by utilising the Area Directors to coordinate the process including meeting with Club Presidents to discuss and submit feedback to the Governor. Individual submissions from Zonta members, Clubs and other officers were also encouraged.
The responses were received by early October. The District Secretary reviewed the responses and synthesised each of the longer submissions.

The Governor used the synthesised responses to organise comments under key headings to compile a District response. Copies of the synthesised responses will be attached to accompany this themed response.
The specific approach in D23 encouraged Clubs and Areas to concentrate on generating ideas for how a Zonta Country Entity for Australia could be formed and what would be the desired principles for formation and advantages of this approach. In addition, there was encouragement to explore remaining issues of concern and formulate questions, particularly, related to the middle section of our Zonta structure currently incorporating Districts and Areas.
The D23 Governor has met regularly with the other two Australian Governors (D22 and D24) since the commencement of the 2026-2028 biennium. Our approach has been to share information freely about our approaches and the results of our consultation. We have begun to explore possible structures that might best support our Zonta mission in Australia. Early and consistent feedback from Zonta International about the results of the consultation process and next steps will be essential in enabling the three Australian Districts with leading and managing this significant change.

Summary of Response

Overall, there was widespread support for the need to change including a requirement to focus on country entities, achieve efficiencies, a flatter structures and movement in the direction of contemporary governance for voluntary international organisations.

There was general support for the structural changes presented in the *Blueprint for the Future* documents. Tangible benefits of the proposed approach were identified by D23 members including examples of how Australian Districts and Clubs are already leading the way with country-wide approaches and collaboration across Districts and Areas. Many responses included suggestions of more detailed principles that could be utilised to support the detail of the change process and ensure intended benefits to the Zonta world. Additionally, there were many issues of concern and a great number of questions identified. These particularly relate to the current lack of detail about the proposed country entities to replace existing Districts and Areas. There were also many questions and comments about the lack of evidence about how the proposed approaches would achieve monetary efficiencies or increase membership which is an acknowledged critical issue. In moving ahead with these proposed changes, it will be critical to pay adequate attention to populating the missing detail, incorporating the identified principles and addressing the many questions that still exist.

Acknowledgment of the Need for Change and in Principle Support for Change to Contemporary Governance approach

There is widespread support for the critical need to change. This was reflected in the D23 responses.
There is agreement that is essential for every level of Zonta International to consider how it can be *fit for the future*.

Overall, the proposed changes are logical, practical, and present a positive step towards a clearer and more streamlined Zonta structure

There is broad agreement for the rationale provided in the Blueprint that concludes that change is critical.

D23 supports the need for change in the Zonta world to ensure that our mission current flourishes.

Zonta International currently has outdated structures and processes for a modern global organisation. Sustainable growth will require flatter structures, transparency and faster decision making.

There is support for a competency-based Board approach including a younger person on the ZI Board and other areas of diversity.

There is broad agreement for a country-based entities in the new Zonta International structure. These could alleviate many issues Zonta currently faces regarding governance, policies, finances and requirements for reporting and meetings.

Australia has the capacity to be a role model in managing this change within our global organisation. Zonta Australia advocacy committee has already brought together members across the three districts and beginning to demonstrate combined strength in one-voice and sharing of resources and expertise. D23 Clubs are already developing and practising contemporary collaborative approaches across the District and Clubs to share resources, initiatives, support and mentoring with hybrid models of virtual and face-to-face communication. These reduce isolation and improve efficiencies whilst supporting innovation

> A national structure should have the benefit of reducing complexity, improving clarity and making the organisation easier to navigate and understand, especially for new members.

D23 supports one Zonta country entity for Australia on the basis that this is not an additional layer within the Zonta structure and agreement that workload must not be pushed down to clubs.

There is agreement that representation at ZI and country level should be based on competency but balanced with diversity.

A consolidated one Zonta in Australia identity presents opportunities for valuable volunteer time developing resources, campaigns, and communications that could be created once and shared across Australia.

There are two current identified areas of developmental work that would be further augmented through support from a fully developed country entity in Australia.

1. National Campaigns
2. Young Women & Emerging Leaders Network

The *Blueprint* directions are supported in principle, but some areas would benefit from a great deal more detail. There is:

- Agreement with the logic of rationalising District and Areas

- Support for a national structure which will have the benefit of reducing complexity improving clarity and making the organisation easier to navigate and understand, especially for new members.
- Encouragement of greater use of virtual meetings that support efficiencies, access and environmental benefits through reduced travel costs.

Suggested Principles and Areas of Focus to Support the Change Process and Ensure Success

D23 acknowledges that there is an important ongoing cultural change that is necessary to support the sustainability of Zonta International into the future. The future of Zonta International will be determined not only by changes at international level. It will be determined ultimately by whether individual members and clubs feel that Zonta is relevant, welcoming, worthwhile and capable of making a difference. Being **"***Fit for the Future***"** means creating a Zonta where members can say:

"I know why I am here; I know the difference I can make, I feel valued, and I can see a future for Zonta."

Some important principles can act as touchstones to support this ongoing cultural change:

- *Simplify rather than complicate.*
- *Connect rather than create distance. Develop leaders rather than depend on them.*
- *Welcome new generations rather than expect them to fit old models.*
- *Strengthen clubs rather than add administration.*
- *Encourage partnerships rather than work in isolation.*
- *And, above all, keep Zonta's mission at the centre of every decision.*

Expressed in a slightly different way the key principles for guiding this change could be summarised under the following four headings

1. **Connection:** Preserve fellowship, geographical networks and relationships between clubs.
2. **Leadership:** Provide accessible development opportunities and meaningful pathways for future leaders.
3. **Ownership:** Involve clubs in shaping, implementing and reviewing the new model, with transparency in decision-making.

4. **Local relevance:** Allow flexibility to meet the needs of different communities while maintaining a shared identity and purpose.

D23 supports a national structure which should have the benefit of reducing complexity, improving clarity, and making the organisation easier to navigate and understand, especially for new members.

The proposed changes should bring about greater use of virtual meetings and thus have environmental benefits through reduced travel.

D23 supports one Zonta country entity for Australia on the basis that this is not an additional layer within the Zonta structure and workload must not be pushed down to clubs.

D23 agrees that representation at ZI and country level should be based on competency balancing the need for diversity including age, geographical location, ethnicity and culture. A smaller ZI Board must ensure that geographical differences and requirements are met.

D23 maintains that Clubs must remain at the heart of Zonta. This is where the service occurs – local arrangements need to be protected and supported.

New structures and practices must acknowledge and take account of different time zones and seasonal differences between northern and southern hemispheres.

In acknowledging reducing membership D23 request that consideration should be given to additional incentives to attract younger members.

D23 propose that titles of office bearers at all levels should align with modern practices and be gender neutral and translate across international boundaries.

D23 support the development of an affordable rotating hybrid national conference approach balanced with maintenance of more localised connections and new cross-country and international digital connection for areas of interest and specialised function.

Areas of Concern and Suggested Approaches

In acknowledging reducing membership consideration should be given to incentives to attract younger members.

Change processes need to ensure –

- workload is not pushed down to clubs

- focus on leadership training and succession planning
- protection for local service and traditions
- that regional and rural clubs have a voice
- Development of clearer ways for clubs to contribute and see results of advocacy
- Further reduction of the existing USA-centric approach to communication, scheduling, and programming.
- Increased recognition of different timeframes around the world by rotating times and recorded sessions.
- Support for one Board per eligible country balanced with the need to consider that not all countries and clubs are the same in terms of size, funds and structure.
- Increased awareness of the impact and disadvantage that minimizing governance arrangements may cause for smaller or less resourced countries and clubs
- Ongoing focus on working through concerns raised about membership, finances, workload, and how structure will work in practice.
- Maintenance of strong connections between ZI and Australia
- Clarity regarding national leadership
- Recognition of Australia's geographical size and diversity
- That regional and remote clubs are not disadvantaged
- That the benefits of Area structures in relation to local collaboration, sharing of knowledge and support is not lost as an unintended consequence of the new structures and processes.
- The development of pathways to encourage young women to join

- Greater clarity on how the new structure will improve membership.

- Approaches to Membership recruitment and retention that support the recognition and value of diversity.

- Titles of office bearers at all levels should align with modern practices and be gender neutral.

- Encouragement of greater use of virtual meetings and thus have environmental benefits through reduced travel.

- Maintenance of Focus on *How can Zonta create a simpler, more responsive and sustainable structure that ensures every club, including regional clubs, has a strong voice, access to support, opportunities for leadership and a meaningful connection to Zonta International?*

- Support for competency-based appointments to Boards balanced with the need to incorporate diversity and support leadership development.

Questions

D23 members continue to raise questions about how the following would be managed –

- face to face contact,
- leadership and development opportunities
- whether larger clubs would be more influential
- whether changes would impact on clubs' local community focus
- What governance structures will be applied to countries/territories with a differing number of members and clubs?
- How will the level of governance under the ZI Board be structured in an equitable manner?
- How will differences such as climate, leadership style, mileage, and culture be managed?
- What will replace district conferences and Area meetings and Area Director support for Clubs? It is imperative that the benefits of collaboration between clubs is not lost and the support for struggling Clubs is not eroded.

- How will this all be funded? 1.What specific functions will a Zonta Australia board take on, and which of today's district and area responsibilities will be removed?
- How will clubs in regional, rural and remote Australia be heard, and how will the board stay connected with them?
- What are the expected costs, and how will funding be shared between Zonta International, Zonta Australia and clubs?
- How will board members be selected, and how will accountability to members be built in?
- How will the structure support club growth, new member recruitment and retention, particularly among younger women?
- How will Zonta Australia work with Zonta New Zealand and Pacific clubs, and secure Oceania's voice in Zonta International?
- What is the timeline, and what decisions remain open to member input?

Next Steps

- It will be essential to make sure there is a continuing feedback process in which clubs can share their experiences, identify barriers, propose solutions and help evaluate the progress and effectiveness of the Blueprint changes. This will assist ZI to understand whether strategies are producing meaningful results across different countries, cultures and club environments.
- There will be a requirement for significant work within the current three Australian Districts to determine what functions transfer to the national entity, what functions are phased out, and what functions must remain at club or local level.

The success of the Blueprint should ultimately be measured not by the efficiency of the governance structure alone, but by whether it creates a stronger, more connected and sustainable organisation at club level. Structural change must translate into practical benefits for members, increased opportunities for future generations of women leaders, stronger community partnerships and greater impact for women and girls. The future structure should support the work of clubs, not become an additional focus of their work.

Conclusion

District 23 are grateful for the extended period to enable our consultation and preparation of a response to the *BluePrint for the Future*. Overall, the proposed changes are logical, practical and a positive step towards a clearer and more streamlined Zonta structure and sustainable future. There are however many

remaining areas of concern and many unanswered questions that need to be addressed. D23 members have been able to define important principles to guide the further development of the proposed structures and the management of the change process. As a District we remain optimistic about the future for Zonta International and our capacity as individual members and Clubs to gain greater visibility with a national identity and increased connection with fellow members around the world in our joint mission to make the world a better place for women and girls.

The success of the Blueprint should ultimately be measured not by the efficiency of the governance structure alone, but by whether it creates a stronger, more connected and sustainable organisation at club level. Structural change must translate into practical benefits for members, increased opportunities for future generations of women leaders, stronger community partnerships and greater impact for women and girls. The future structure should support the work of clubs, not become an additional focus of their work.

Wendy Quinn

Governor D23 Zonta International

October 28th 2026