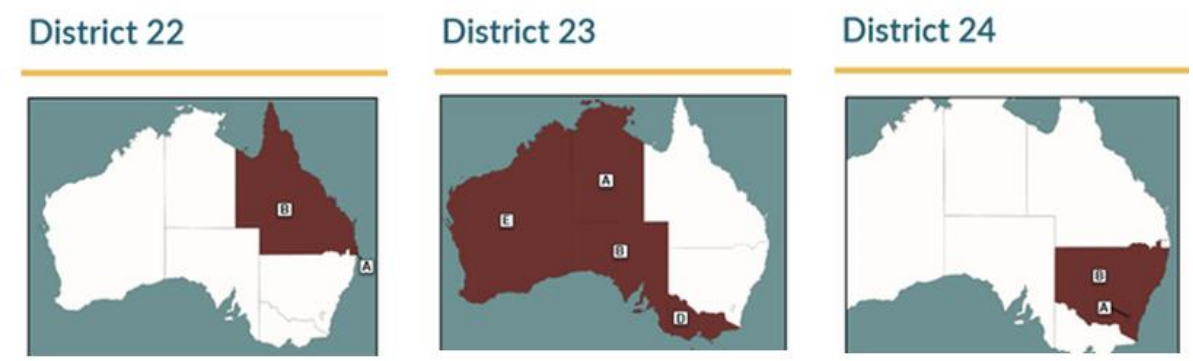
District 22 Board Feedback to Zonta International (ZI) on the Blueprint for the Future

October 2026

Introducing District 22

District 22 (D22) is one of the three Australian Districts. All Districts have the same National laws, currency, and main language and we do not have any other countries in our districts. Geographically, D22 is the second-largest Australian District, with the highest number of Clubs and members. Together the three districts cover a huge geographical area and currently have 94 Clubs.



Australian Zonta Clubs

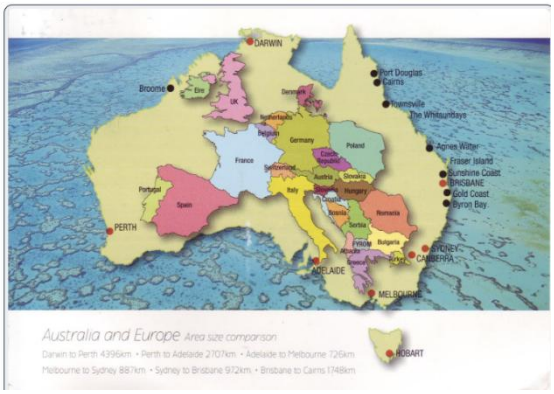
D22: 40 QLD (1 e-Club), 1 NSW = 41
D23: 4 TAS, 4 WA, 12 SA, 10 VIC (1 e-Club) = 30
D24: 22 NSW (1 e-Club), 1 ACT = 23
Total = 94
(Thanks to Nshara for the map).



How vast are our distances? This vast. Our situation is quite different to many other Zonta countries and districts, and we need the members of the Governance Advisory Committee to understand that. One Blueprint solution does not fit all.



Australia compared to Europe



Zonta International's situation

The District 22 Board members thank the Zonta International Board and the ZI Governance Advisory Committee for the work put into the review over the last four years. Members voted for this review, and we are very keen to see Zonta International thrive well into the future. We understand that to achieve this, change is needed, or the current threat of rising costs and declining membership for Zonta International will continue.

We are not sure that the Blueprint is the answer, but we are willing to consider options. We find ourselves in a 'Catch 22' situation. Since the design phase has not yet been completed, we lack detail about how a post-Blueprint Australia might look, yet we can't have this detail until after the design phase. Thus, we are in limbo.

We cannot support the Blueprint as currently suggested, as that will not suit Australia. After the design phase, we may be able to support the Blueprint plans, if we can see that there is a solution for Australia that will work. That's currently unknown.

Feedback from District Members – our process

We encouraged our members to attend Convention, read the Blueprint Documents, view the videos, and attend the ZI Town Hall Meeting. We then invited members to give feedback during five online District meetings, or submit feedback of 100 words, or email longer feedback.

We encouraged all members to also submit individual feedback directly to ZI.

The results from the feedback we received:

- The majority of our 878 members were silent on the issue. We had 71/886 members (or approximately 8%) respond.
- Some Area Directors and Presidents expressed that it's challenging to rally interest in the Blueprint.
- Overall, of those who gave feedback, members have misgivings and have expressed that it would be easier to stay the same, but if we must change, we'll do our best to make it work.
- Opinions varied. A small number of members expressed strong opposition to the Blueprint, especially the idea of merging the 3 Australian Districts.
- A small number of members are strongly in favour of the Blueprint and are very keen to see changes to Zonta.
- The majority who contributed feedback expressed mixed feelings, with widespread concern about how we would make the merge of districts work without Area Directors, given our huge geographical area and number of clubs.
- Almost all of those who contributed feedback said that Australia will need some kind of structure in between a national Board and the Clubs.

Thoughts expressed by members about a possible merged structure

District members have told us that:

- Due to the large geographical area and number of clubs:

- A National Board operating directly above the Clubs, with nothing in between would not be feasible; an intermediate structure would be essential.
- The role of Board Chair (or President or Country Leader, etc) cannot have the same duties as the current Governor role. Some of the role currently filled by the Governor may need to fall to the National Board members.
- Most members who contributed feedback have been clear that they would prefer Australia to stay as we are.
- Most members also do not favour a head-in-the-sand approach and indicated that this biennium we need to start looking at possible structures, with the other two Australian Districts, in case the Blueprint goes ahead. It would be helpful to identify common ground and any points of difference.

Questions

Financial Questions:

- Members expressed that the explanation of how the restructure (and the Blueprint generally) will save ZI money, is thin. Members are unconvinced. Will ZI provide a more detailed cost analysis?
- Members are concerned about costs of the restructure to the three districts (and therefore to a newly formed Australian entity). We understand that exact costs will not be known prior to decisions about structure. **Q:** Will there be any financial assistance provided from ZI? If so, can you provide details?
- **Membership Costs:** Cost is a significant barrier to membership. ZI dues will be USD 98 (AUD 139.37), with a new-member fee of USD 15 (AUD 21.33). Joining Zonta therefore requires international fees of USD 113 (AUD 160.70). District 22 dues are the lowest in Australia at USD 21.10 (AUD 30), with Club dues payable in addition. As we have no Area dues, merging the Australian districts would not reduce these costs: Country dues would replace District dues. To support **diversity**, some D22 Clubs subsidise membership fees, so that people with fewer financial resources can participate. In some D22 Clubs, some members make anonymous donations towards dues for others, for the same reason**.** One D22 Club was low on members, so they experimented by charging less than the ZI dues for their total membership fee, thus heavily subsidising the costs. The increase in new members was significant. High dues costs do affect membership. We find this to be particularly true for younger prospective members with young children**. Q:** Can ZI provide any hope that ZI dues will go down? Will the Blueprint help with this and if so, how?

Structure Questions:

- **Middle Structure:** Can ZI confirm that if the Blueprint plans proceed, Australian Districts (like other large geographical areas with many clubs) will have flexibility to design a middle structure that suits us and that we believe is essential to maintaining thriving clubs and strong membership? It is important to our members that we maintain strong support for Clubs. Presidents have expressed that local support from people who understand the Club's situation has been crucial. We are in a very different situation from a geographically small country with for example, 20 Clubs. We are very certain that

the disconnect would be too great, without some middle structure. **Q:** Can ZI confirm that a merged Australia will be supported to have a middle section in which Club Liaisons can support Clubs in manageable clusters?

- **Meetups: Q:** Can ZI confirm that countries will have the flexibility to organise meetups as they see fit?
- **ZI Liaison:** Currently a Liaison travels to Australia for 3 Conferences, for 3 weekends in a row. The flight cost to ZI is the same if they attend for one weekend. We can see a saving for ZI and for countries if we Zoom the ZI Liaison into Conference and other events.
- **Leadership opportunities:** In some areas of the world, the Blueprint would mean, for example, that a District with 1 Board, that splits into 5 countries, with 5 National Boards, would have greatly increased leadership opportunities for members. In Australia, the opposite would happen. We currently have 3 Districts and 3 boards. A merge would mean only 1 board and therefore would greatly reduce the leadership opportunities. **Q:** Will we be able to have a middle structure, which may partly address this?

Contemporary Tools

- Some members are very interested in ZI using contemporary tools to streamline and automate work that is currently manual. Q: Could we please have more detail about this as the information becomes available?

Awards:

- We understand that you are aware that a move to a country structure would require some re-thinking to ensure equitable access to ZI Awards. **Q:** Could we have details of plans for Award equity as soon as these are available?

Possible Future Structure – suggestions by D22 members

Various possible structures have been suggested.

- **Adjust the role of the Governor/Country Leader/Chair** (or other name): Due to concerns about overload in this role, a suggestion was to consider that some state-based directors would be on the National Board. These would fill the Club-related part of the duties that are currently undertaken by Governors. The suggestion for some National Board roles to be state based was also related to state advocacy, however there are other ways to handle this.
- **Create a middle structure that offers support to Clubs.**
    - Members expressed very strongly that Clubs and Members appreciate, and count on, the work done by the Area Directors. Members strongly expressed that there is no substitute for the personal contact and support, with local knowledge, that Area Directors currently provide. Members believe that we would have lost more Clubs if it were not for the support offered by the Area Directors.
    - A National Australian Board is not going to be able to adequately cover this across 94 Clubs. The time demands can be significant when Clubs face challenges. Overloading the National Australian Board members would increase the risk of burnout of volunteers. A middle structure spreads the workload.

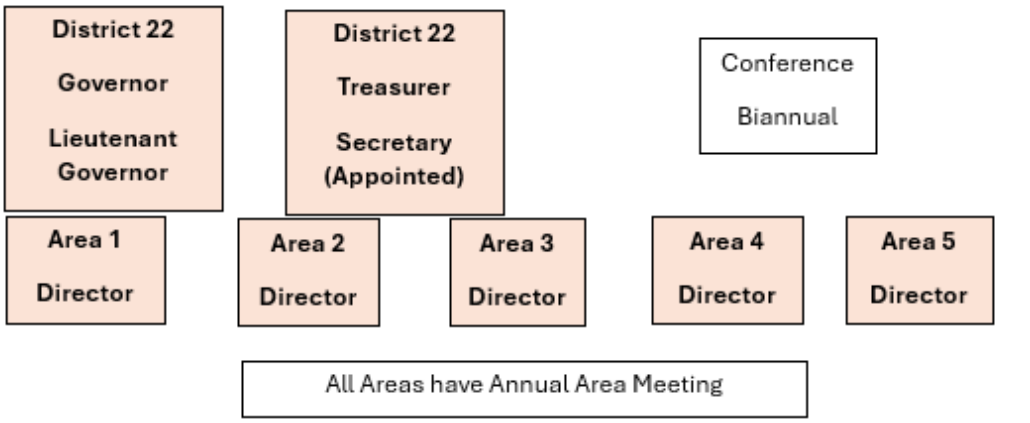
- Situations vary widely: A country with, for example, a National Board and 20 Clubs in a comparatively small geographical area is a very different situation. Our District members strongly believe that without a supportive middle section in any new Australian structure, Zonta clubs in Australia will start disconnecting and we will lose Clubs and Members.

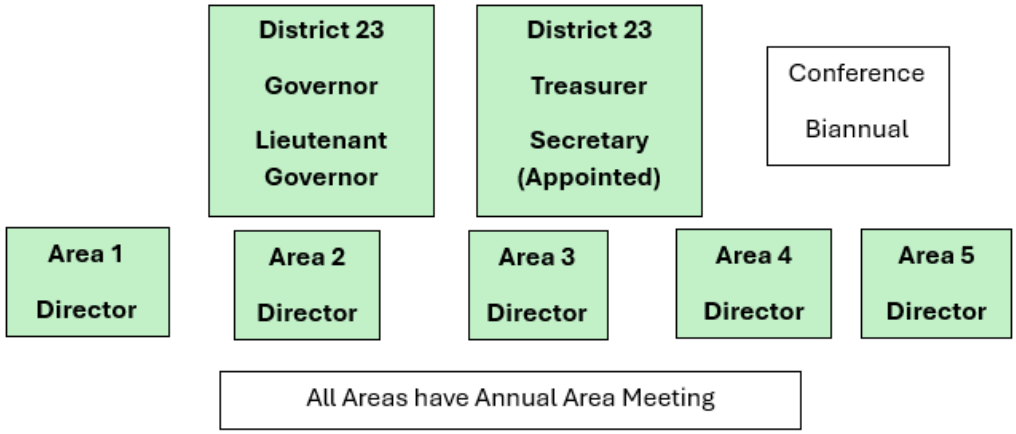
D22 Capability Study

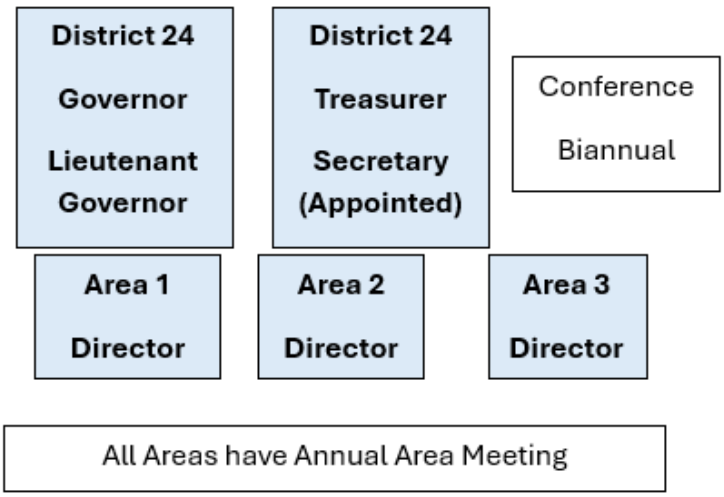
We completed a capability study to help us identify our strengths and decide what is important to preserve. This section is compiled by Nshara Kingston, D22 Lt Governor.

This section examines the current organisational structure, including leadership arrangements, showing how effectively it operates. It considers concerns about removing the middle management layer, particularly the increased demands on leadership roles, the potential loss of connection, and challenges associated with geographical distances. It also proposes an alternative structure to address these concerns.

The charts below show the current Board structures of each of the three districts in Australia.

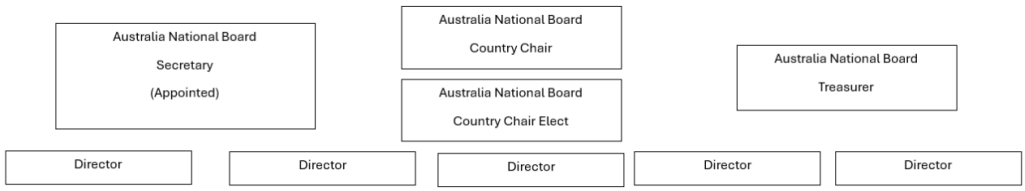






Leadership Concern

Currently in Australia we have 3 boards consisting of 25 leadership positions to oversee over 90 clubs. This current leadership structure is working well with members confidently stepping into the roles regardless of their commitments outside of Zonta. Unfortunately, we do not have full details on what the Blueprint will require for leadership positions for Australia, however, it is indicated that Districts, Areas and Area Directors will be removed. We can then assume that the board of a merged Australia might possibly look like the following chart.



This would mean that there would be 9 people taking over the roles of 25 people. Our concern is that limiting the number of volunteer leadership roles in an organisation can place greater demands on the individuals who remain in those positions. With fewer leaders available to share responsibilities, each person may face a heavier workload, increased time commitments and greater pressure to manage tasks, support volunteers and make important decisions. This can affect morale and increase the risk of burnout.

This increased workload could also make these leadership roles unattainable for the many members who work or have other pressing commitments. Volunteer leadership roles should be accessible to everyone, including people who work, care for family members or have limited time available. Flexible responsibilities, shared leadership and a range of time commitments can help more people contribute in ways that suit their circumstances. Having a busy schedule should not rule anyone out from taking on a meaningful volunteer leadership role. After all, Zonta is supposed to be an opportunity for all to be empowered.

Connection Concern

A further concern with regards to removing the middle layer is that of connection, feedback from members in conversations, during online meetings and at the convention has consistently emphasised the importance of connection, and concern about losing face-to-face contact (particularly the removal of Area Meetings). There has been mention that the number of members attending Area Meetings is falling. However, on looking back at area meeting numbers over the past 10 years, in District 22, the numbers have remained steady, as per the table below.

Area Meeting Attendance Numbers District 22						
	Area 1&3	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5
2016	85		35		22	
2017			36		53	45
2018	73		30			
2019		46	38	39		
2020	COVID	COVID	COVID	COVID	COVID	COVID
2021		74	30	43	34	46
2022	89		38			30
2023			36		29	
2024						
2025			34	51	32	
2026			36			42

(Information from Area Meeting Reports available in the D22 archives)

Geographical Concern

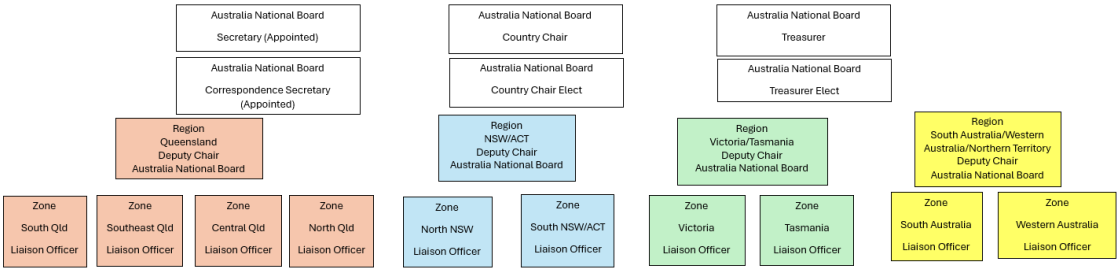


Australia's vast size and widely dispersed towns mean that travelling between destinations can involve long distances and substantial journey times. Road trips may take several days, particularly through remote inland areas, where fuel stops, accommodation and mobile coverage can be limited. Travel times also depend on road conditions, seasonal flooding, extreme heat and the need for regular rest breaks, so distances alone are not a reliable guide when planning an itinerary. Allowing extra time, checking local conditions and planning realistic daily distances are essential.

Flying can reduce travel time between major centres, but airport transfers and onward journeys still need to be considered. In many areas, flying from one regional town to another means flying to the State capital first, then flying out again to the other regional town.

Without a middle layer giving the opportunity to meet face to face within a reasonable distance, members are concerned about losing connection and feeling isolated. Once again, we would be limiting opportunities for working members to experience valuable personal connection. The same applies to those who care for children or others, and those with many other commitments.

One Possible Australian Structure



This draft of a possible Australian Zonta structure is not static, nor the only possibility, rather it is one demonstration of addressing the concerns of the geographical situation and concerns from members regarding connection and leadership opportunities.

Note: Preliminary discussions between the three Australian Governors have occurred regarding possible structures.

In this scenario, the Australian Board would consist of 10 members. Each Deputy Chair would be the chair of National Committees such as Membership, Advocacy and Fund Raising. Liaison Officers would act as a communication line for clubs to the board and co-ordinate connection between the clubs in their zones. They would not be board members.

This proposed structure ensures that personal connections can remain, which is vitally important for membership engagement and retention. On-line engagement can also be increased. Currently, district committees meet via Zoom or Teams meetings which works well, but members have stressed that if meeting on-line were the only option, they would not renew their membership. This is quite concerning.

The following charts show each region's structure with a workable number of clubs per zone. Geographical distances are also shown and would be reasonable to allow for regular person to person connection.

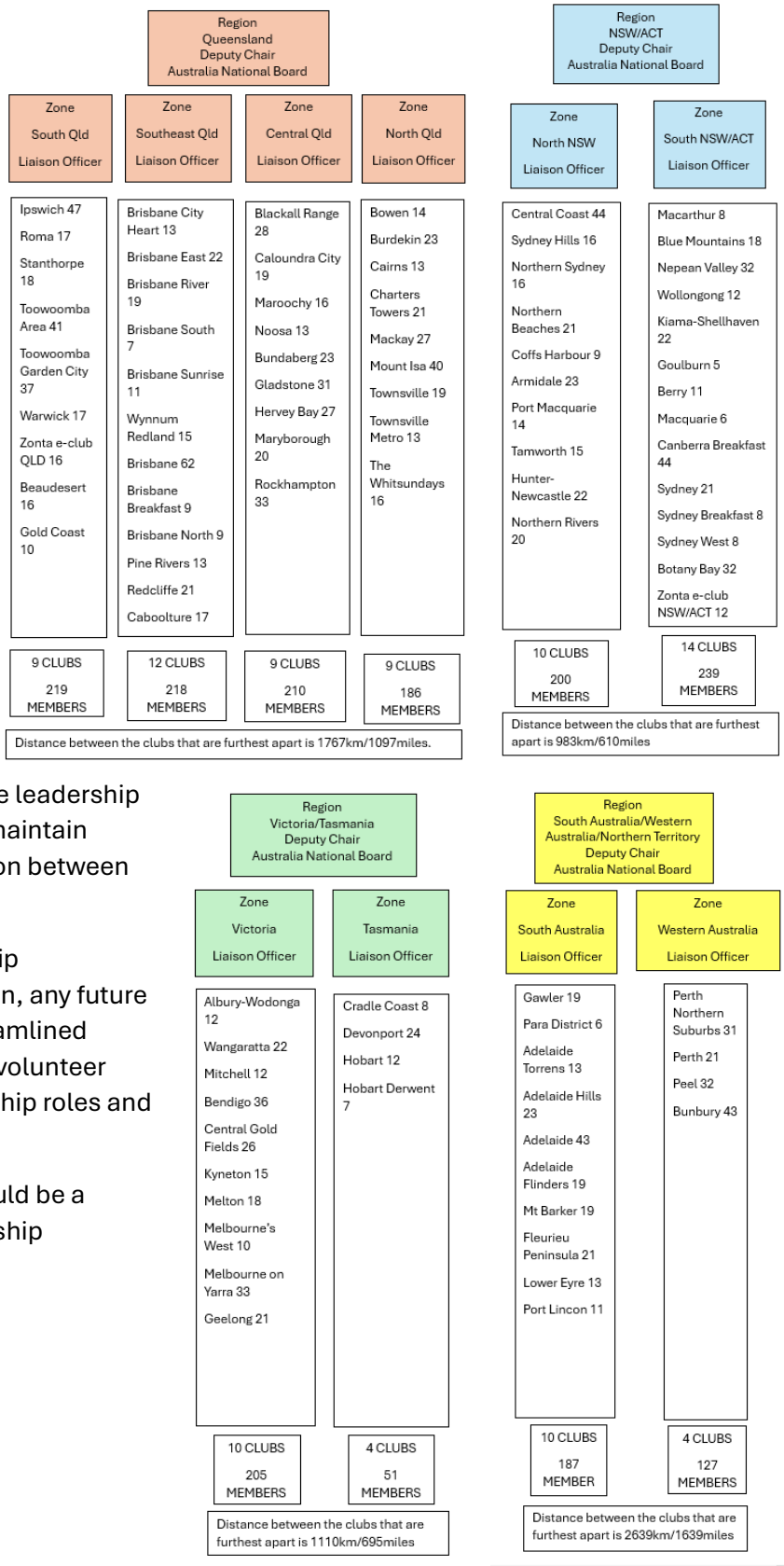
The central concerns are that removing the middle management layer could concentrate responsibilities in fewer volunteer leaders, reduce access to leadership opportunities and weaken the face-to-face connections that our members value.

Australia's geographical distances add to these challenges, making local support and opportunities to meet particularly important.

This proposed Australian structure offers one possible alternative for consideration: a National Board supported by committee leadership and zonal Liaison Officers to maintain communication and connection between clubs.

While the Blueprint's leadership arrangements remain uncertain, any future structure should balance streamlined governance with manageable volunteer workloads, accessible leadership roles and meaningful local engagement.

Retaining these strengths should be a priority in supporting membership engagement and retention.



100 Word Feedback

Members were invited to submit 100 words to be added verbatim.

#	100-word Feedback from D22 Members
1.	I understand some of the challenges facing ZI within its current structure. The restructure in the Blueprint might not look to favour Australia but I think we have to think internationally. Australians are resourceful and we can make the proposed new structure work well here to continue to build a better world for women and girls.
2.	I'm conscious that we are planning for a future world in which I am not here. I'm not sure exactly what that world looks like, but I know that Zonta's important work needs to be part of it. I have trust in those who lead us now, and those who will follow me. Although it would be easier to stay the same, if we must change, we will work it out. We are clever, strong, determined, resourceful and remarkable. To Build a Better World for Women and Girls, Zonta needs to be dynamic, resilient and Fit for the Future.
3.	Throughout history communities have operated with women of various ages organising and supporting each other to sustain and improve their community. A truly representative organisation will have members of all ages, skills, interests etc. Very necessary to have younger members in any organisation however, having younger leaders does not make a community or organisation/club necessarily a better one from which to serve the community. Modernisation is important and necessary but don't dismiss the knowledge and wisdom of mature years. Just as it takes a community to raise a child, it takes difference and diversity of membership to form a healthy and dynamic organisation/club.
4.	The geographical distance between clubs is an important consideration when looking at any new Australian structure. We are open to change and supportive of looking at new ways of working, but the Australian context needs to be part of that conversation. A new model should still encourage clubs or members to regularly come together in person. A successful structure needs to recognise our unique geography and ensure that all clubs - including those in regional and remote communities - can participate meaningfully without an unreasonable financial or travel burden.
5.	My main concern is what these changes will mean for an ordinary club member. With districts and areas replaced by a country structure, will clubs still have reasonable access to someone who provides the personal support currently offered by governors and area directors? What will implementation and ongoing administration cost, and could membership fees increase? How will existing district awards be managed? Girls in regional communities should retain fair opportunities, rather than face fewer awards or greater competition across a larger pool. Before proceeding, members need clear, practical explanations of how local support, affordability and equitable award opportunities will be maintained.
6.	The Zonta Club of Brisbane East Inc is categorically opposed to the Zonta International Blueprint, and this should be advised to both Zonta International and Zonta District 22 Ltd and included in the District 22 submission. Rationale:

	♣ Blueprint provides insufficient detail on its consultation and subsequent deliberations to justify the proposed changes to current District structure; ♣ Blueprint provides no analysis to show how the proposed change will increase membership; and ♣ No information provided as to estimated cost, legal or operational implications of implementing restructure
7.	Blueprint feedback The sustainability of ZI is critical to the existence of clubs, and the data provided shows a need to address membership and financial issues. A proposal has been presented however it requires communication with clubs: • A business case for this proposed solution – current data and projected data including balance sheets, profit and loss details etc. • Membership details and strategies with evidence of how this proposal will increase membership • Other solutions that have been considered. As a district it is important that whatever the final design is, we contribute positively to the outcome reflecting the needs of our clubs and context.
8.	Change for Zonta International is clearly warranted. The Blueprint presents a strong case that the current structure is complex, costly and increasingly difficult to sustain, particularly with declining membership and leadership pressures. I support modernising governance, improving efficiency and strengthening national advocacy. However, I am concerned that the proposed Zonta Australia governance model may not be the best fit for Australia. Removing districts and areas risks weakening the close connections, mentoring, communication and sense of belonging that currently exist between members and clubs. Any new model must ensure Australian members remain connected, supported and represented across our large geography.

We have done our best to fairly represent the views of our members, as expressed to us. We are thankful for the opportunity to express our feedback. We also thank the Zonta International Board members and Governance Committee for their years of work on the Blueprint.

On behalf of the District Board members and members of D22,



District 22 Governor, Robyn Liddell