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The Australian Society for Microbiology has remained broad based for the many decades of its existence. In the absence of a publishing house to underwrite it, we continue to hold regular meetings and maintain a strong membership.

The executive (President, President-Elect or Immediate-Past, and the three Vice Presidents, Scientific, Corporate and Communications) therefore tend to run the national business of the Society, which is to a significant extent centred on the national scientific meeting.

The State branches drive the main activities in each state, which requires a large investment of time and energy, and these are a major part of the value of ASM to members.

One of the most important signs of health in a Society like ours is the level of participation in the democratic processes within it. The structure of our Society places most of the regular decision-making powers in the Council. Council meets only twice a year and has a lot of business to get through when it does, in a meeting that takes the whole day and is mostly driven by the national executive. The national executive makes a lot of key decisions in a consensus model but major decisions/structural changes are referred to

national Council. Major changes such as constitutional reforms must be decided by the membership at an Annual General Meeting.

The Council has limited time and resources to develop strategic capacity. In recent years, we have brought together the state and national executives by bringing State Chairs in to Council, and more recently by introducing regular teleconferences between state and national executives. The Divisional Chairs are senior national discipline leaders that are essential for strategic management but are presently only in the National Scientific Advisory Council, with special responsibilities in scientific content and discipline balance. The national Chairs can attend Council and Executive by invitation but presently do not have a formal constitutionally defined role outside the NSAC.

In order to better manage the Society, you will notice we have focused on bringing our Associate Membership into full Membership (MASM) wherever possible. The cost of membership is no different but the Associate Membership has no voting rights and therefore cannot effectively participate in the national conversation. We urge all Associate Members to apply for MASM, a simple process through the Membership section of the website (<http://www.theasm.org.au/membership/>). This gives you a vote.

However, exercising your vote to effect or prevent major proposed changes requires attendance at the AGM, which is held at the Annual Scientific Meeting (Perth, 3 July: <http://asm2015.asnevents.com.au/>), which is not always practical.

At this year's ASM I will be asking the membership to consider moving to an online voting system, such as in many other comparable Societies, so that major changes do not need to wait for an AGM and so that every member can participate. We need to bring the Society back to the membership so that it can be responsive to change and reactive to needs.

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