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101 Collins Street
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23 October 2025

Ms. Lyn Allison and Mr. Stuart Hamilton
Chair and Secretary
The Accountability Roundtable (ART)

Dear Lyn and Stuart

Thank you for inviting me to conduct a review of the performance of the Board of the Accountability Roundtable (ART). This review is designed to address the purpose outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR), namely, to assess the effectiveness of ART in fulfilling its mission as currently set out in its Constitution.

The questionnaire and the one-on-one interviews covered the scope of the ToR, including:

- Board composition, skills, and diversity
- Roles and responsibilities of Board members
- Effectiveness of Board meetings and decision-making processes
- Relationship and communication with the Membership, allies and stakeholders
- Performance in terms of the intended impact.

The findings are based on interviews with eleven of the thirteen directors (Barry Jones fell ill and John Hewson was unavailable), four members and senior leaders of three peer organisations (TI, CPI and ADN). Also, twelve board members and thirty members completed a questionnaire which probed various aspects of the board's performance. The aggregated questionnaire results are attached to this document.

This document begins by pointing to questionnaire and interview responses that are worth noting. Then, there are five suggestions for the board to consider.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW FEEDBACK

The questionnaire feedback and interviews revealed some consistent themes about the relative strengths and improvement areas for ART, and some choices about the pathway forward. This document will not step through the responses in detail. Instead, it highlights a few that are worth noting. Some of these are picked up in the next section where a few suggestions are offered.

A good first step is to look for any sign of dysfunction regarding how the board's role is perceived. The questionnaire responses are quite consistent across the board and the membership on important aspects of the role. On the positive side, the board is seen as having the requisite

knowledge about the major issues to provide adequate advice and probing (over 80% agree or strongly agree) and understand the factors that drive external impact (over 50% agree or strongly agree). One representative comment was *"We have an enormously talented board and membership"*. In addition, 70% of members (but only 42% of the board) agree that the board contributes effectively to the development of strategy. Several directors stated they would like more discussion and clarity on the strategy/focus of ART. Typical comments include *"We don't have a clear view on what ART should be doing"*. And *"We are lacking a strong sense of direction."*

On many other aspects of the board's role the questionnaire responses are on the weaker side. For example, only 25% of the board and 50% of members agree or strongly agree that the board effectively implements strategy. Only 33% of board members agree that the board is adequately monitoring external impact. Only 17% of board members believe that the board is achieving a good balance between 'compliance' and 'performance' matters. And lastly, only 25% of the board and 30% of members believe that ART is having the intended external impact.

These findings are consistent with interview responses, although the depth of feeling did vary between interviewees. Despite one director saying that *"Everything is working quite well"*, a clear majority of the ART board and members feel deeply that strategic clarity is lacking, and implementation of strategy is below expectations.

It is worth noting that the operating model of ART as a voluntary membership organisation is quite different from most other larger not-for-profits and commercial companies. The model also differs from organisations that address similar topics, such as CPI, TI and the Australian Democracy Network (ADN), all of which rely on paid staff to help implement their plans. Today ART relies 100% on volunteers with no paid staff in any capacity. Which goes to the heart of the implementation effectiveness issue.

The interviews also revealed a widely held view that the membership was not well engaged by the board. Several members said that they had offered support in some form but that it had not been taken up. One member stated: *"I did some other things for the board that faded away, I don't know what happened with them"*. Almost everyone recognised the talent that resides within the membership, and despite the perceived lack of engagement, the membership remains relatively stable, which likely reflects members' passion for the subject matter pursued by ART. ART's membership feels like a tremendous but under-utilised resource.

The questionnaire responses from board members regarding people-related questions were mixed, but only the question asking if the tenure limit for directors should be maintained received a strongly positive response (67% agree). For example, only 8% of the board agree or strongly agree that effective procedures exist to deal with inadequate performance by directors, and only 33% agree that directors put in the required amount of effort. Only 33% of the board and 23% of members felt that the process of selecting directors was appropriate. A few director interviewees felt that the contributions from board members were uneven with some not adding a lot of value. And several felt that one director took up too much airtime in board meetings (note: I listened to one full board meeting and observed this behaviour). A strong theme from interviews was a desire to *"refresh the board"*. Despite the tenure limits, many felt that the board was too old on average and lacked some of the requisite skills. For example, one director stated that *"We have no understanding of how social media is used"*. Today the board appears to be very content focused rather than having a mix of skills relevant to the functioning of ART. Social media and communications are two obvious areas where more expertise could be beneficial.

Procedural and process topics appear to be working quite well. 75% or more of the directors agreed that board meeting location and frequency was appropriate, and that there was sufficient time to share views and discuss issues. However, the board was evenly split as to whether the board's use of time was effective, that appropriate time was allocated to important issues and whether the chair was well prepared for board meetings. Directors had mildly positive views on the scope and number of committees but 0% felt that they were working well. Interviews suggest that the anti-corruption committee has made more progress than the others. The Exco was seen as a work-in-process, a good idea but with limited impact to date.

The final questionnaire section on board behaviours revealed uniformly positive views on almost all questions, for example over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that contributions in meetings were constructive, that bad news was communicated quickly and openly, and that dissent was ok. Typical comments include: *“Challenge is ok and respectfully done”* and *“We have a lot of passion for the topics and a lot of trust between us”*. However, only 33% felt that conflicts of interest were handled appropriately.

The questions pertaining to the performance of the chair received mixed responses from board members. 58% agree that the chair listens well and draws out the views of others, and 58% agree that the chair actively promotes board cohesion and good working relationships. However, the feedback was less positive regarding the chair's leadership effectiveness and grasp of the major issues facing the organisation. Interview responses were more nuanced with some being happy with the chair's performance and others wanting a change.

Based on the assessments in this review, five suggestions are made, as follows.

FIVE SUGGESTIONS

There are a few themes that underpin the suggestions that follow. These are based on a combination of questionnaire and interview inputs. It is worth saying upfront that most directors are supportive of material changes to the way ART operates, but not all. There are a couple who believe that ART is running quite well as is. However, this view is at odds with member questionnaire feedback, most directors, and those of similar organisations (e.g., CPI).

Firstly, ART needs to significantly raise its game in terms of implementation. Secondly, a process of board renewal is worth consideration, with an emphasis on increasing functional skills on the board. And thirdly, there should be more formal and informal engagement between the board members and the membership.

Lastly, it is worth reviewing whether the Exco and committee set-up is working and whether there is a better way to get things done. That said, dedicated implementation capacity and board renewal may address the issues here.

The five suggestions are as follows:

- 1. Add dedicated, paid capacity to better drive implementation of ART's objectives:**
The most cited internal and external area for improvement is the impact that ART has. As mentioned above, only 25% of the board and 30% of members believe ART is having

the intended external impact. 50% of the board disagrees or strongly disagrees with the statement *"The board effectively implements strategy"*. In the words of one member: *"Gold is laying on the ground, it needs to be gathered"*. Similar organisations observe the same lack of impact. ART membership contains individuals with extraordinary expertise but often the application of that expertise in support of the organisation's objectives is incomplete or too late to have the full effect. Most similar organisations have paid capacity to precisely address this shortfall. Across the board there is strong support for some paid capacity, with most wanting it deployed in support of effective implementation. It can also help address some other issues raised by many, including member engagement, getting deliverables from committees/working groups and coordinating social media and communications.

The process of securing funding needs to be resolved. There is a hunger for ART to achieve DGR status, but that process is long, complex and probably requires ART to take on a broader mandate in terms of external impact. As the CEO of a similar organisation stated: *"If ART wants DGR status, they need to be realistic about how much money exists in the philanthropic sector. And I would then see them as a competitor"*. The funding for a 2 to 3-days/week part-time resource will need to be borne by the membership or via donations – waiting on DGR status will take too long.

2. **Refresh the leadership and the composition of the board:** There are several positive aspects of the chair's contributions but in aggregate, the organisation is seen as a bit rudderless and lacking energy. A new chair must address some specific issues including one director occupying an excessive amount of airtime in meetings; stronger management of board discussions (to stay on topic); and drive a process of board renewal. Currently only 8% of the board thinks effective procedures exist to deal with inadequate performance by directors.

The ART board is heavy on domain knowledge and topic experience but is missing important functional skills, for example, social media and communications expertise. ART would benefit from adding these skills to the board and there are capable candidates within the current membership. At the risk of sounding age-ist, this is an old board on average, and many directors and several members recommended the addition of some younger members to the board. A board renewal process is worth considering, to expand the skill set and add some younger members to the board.

The size of the board is not a major issue; while some directors think it should be smaller, its size is not a major cause of its ineffectiveness today. The impact of the Exco is seen as mixed but seems worth retaining to see what impact some of these other suggestions will have on its effectiveness.

3. **Revitalise engagement with the membership:** Today the members do not feel engaged to any great extent. And when they are engaged, they sometimes lose visibility of how their contributions are used. The membership is one of ART's most precious and valuable assets, but it is not being harnessed in a systematic and consistent manner. Engagement appears to be somewhat ad-hoc based on member feedback. Adding some paid capacity is a necessary but insufficient step to overcome this. A re-think of how to utilise and involve the membership is warranted.

4. **Reshape board meeting agendas and review the value of the committees:** Only 17% of board members agree or strongly agree that the board is achieving a good balance between 'compliance' and 'performance' matters in meetings. The creation of the Exco has had some positive impact in terms of reducing the purely administrative component of board meetings, but clearly this is not yet sufficient for the board. Again, a new Chair and the addition of some paid capacity may help address this issue.

The scope of the various committees is seen as reasonable, but not a single board member thinks that all committees carry out their tasks well. A review of the usefulness of the committees is critical – they either need to fundamentally change the way they operate or simply disband. Today they are perceived as not adding much value at all.

5. **Clarify strategy and focus areas:** Several directors and members expressed concern about the actual focus of ART, in terms of topic areas and geography. A typical member comment was *“The real question is, what are we now, what are we supposed to be doing? We basically talk amongst ourselves. We do not have a clear view on what ART should be doing”*. Is ART focused on Victoria and the Federal Government; is it broader than this? Does ART need to restate what topic areas it will cover and explicitly state what it will not? The constitution includes objectives such as *“Developing and disseminating educational material to the public,”* and *“Improving the quality of and access to educational material for the public.”* Are these still a core part of what ART does? Given ART’s perceived lack of impact today, there is a case to revisit its focus and narrow it down to where it can have the greatest effect.

In conclusion, ART is at a crossroads. Without substantive change, it will continue to be seen internally and externally as ineffective, which is a shame given the quality of its membership. Drastic change is needed if it is to retain its talent and reclaim its past influence. Without some of the adjustments suggested above, there is a genuine risk that core members may decide to step off the board; a majority of the board members are deeply frustrated with the current state of ART.

The raison d’être of ART remains relevant, and with a more effective operating model there may be also opportunities to collaborate further with organisations like CPI and ADN.

No organisation is perfect and hopefully this report offers some useful suggestions for further improvement – or, at least, discussion.

Again, I thank you for inviting me to be part of this review process.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Clark