

Feedback from The Discussion Forum: 3rd September 2022

Summary of Comments and Questions

A discussion forum was held on 3rd September 2022 to which anyone from our family of churches was invited. Prior to the forum, draft recommendations were sent to our churches regarding changes to our processes of affiliation for churches and ongoing accreditation or recognition of pastors. During the forum there were opportunities for group discussion and for individuals to submit questions. The Assembly Council has considered the comments and questions in their entirety. Below is a summary of the issues raised in the feedback and question process.

WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS POSITIVE ABOUT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS?

There were several expressions of gratitude for the process. Examples include:

“Well done to Council in responding to direction from Assembly.”

“Being a draft, there is opportunity for further revision.”

“Cleaned up and clarified more of the issues.”

A number of other positive comments were later received about the running of the forum day.

There were some comments appreciating that the Association’s position on marriage is not changing.

There were several positive remarks about the structure of the recommendations. Of particular note were numerous participants appreciating that the marriage statement was removed from the list of values and added to a list of position statements.

Other examples of positive aspects about the structure of the recommendations included:

- *“Good timing for reviewing affirmations.”*
- *“Affirm and support language was helpful.”*

HOW DO YOU THINK THESE RECOMMENDATIONS COULD BE IMPROVED? WHAT CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THESE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS?

There were numerous submissions suggesting an adjustment to the structure in regard to what we ‘affirm’ or ‘support’. Several participants suggested an improvement would be to move the position statements from the ‘affirm’ to the ‘support’ category. Examples of these comments include:

- *“Move position statements from ‘affirm’ to ‘support’”*
- *“None of the Position Statements warrant ‘affirm’ status and all should be ‘support’ only.”*

There were a variety of other concerns raised and improvements suggested.

These included concerns about such things as:

- the place of the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of all believers in these recommendations;
- the elevation of position statements to have the same place as the basic doctrines;
- altering our basis of unity;
- the 5 year period being too long;
- that we have not satisfactorily explored and discussed the biblical position on marriage;
- the pastoral and missional implications of the discussion and upcoming decisions.

In these concerns was evidence of participants searching for middle-ground while also showing stark differences of opinion. For example, some comments indicated a desire to not add new ‘boundary markers’ while other feedback urged for the need to have such ‘boundary markers’.

The desire was expressed to have a higher percentage for adopting the recommendations when it comes to voting on them at the upcoming Assembly. An example is:

“Will the AC set a consensus number rather than just running on a majority vote to proceed? ... Could the same consensus be used for this as for other issues such as the election of the Director of Ministries (consistency with other parts of the constitution).”

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU STILL HAVE TO BE ANSWERED?

Questions from the discussion groups and from participants texting questions (for which there was insufficient time to answer on the day) include the following categories.

Procedural Questions: There were several questions asking about what happens next; how the process will be managed, clear and promoted to all our diverse churches, and so on. Examples include:

- *“Why don’t we have a communicator for the Ethnic churches?”*
- *“Should we push to a vote in November?”*

Property and Insurance Questions: Participants asked about matters to do with properties held by the Property Trust, and insurance, and the implications for churches who may end up leaving the Association. *[Note that these matters were covered in the Draft Recommendations Document]*

Questions about the categories of ‘affirm’ and ‘support’ in the proposal: There were a number of participants asking for clarification about the categories and how they applied in certain contexts. Many of these questions reflected similar comments noted above about the ‘affirm’ and ‘support’ categories. Examples include:

- *“Given pastoral candidates respond to the Statement of Beliefs, could not we mirror this with the position statements?”*
- *“Please help me understand why the Basic Doctrines need to be affirmed and the Statement of Faith only supported when there are multiple statements that appear in both ...”*
- *“Why can’t we place the Position Statements into the ‘support’ category?”*
- *“Does this motion elevate the traditional definition of marriage above the level of Baptist distinctives?”*

Implementation Questions:

A number of questions revolved around how such a process would be rolled out and asking whether there would be support and resources for pastors and churches in that process. There was also some questions about how a church could have a genuine discussion about the theology of marriage, without having fear of the outcome if these recommendations are passed.

Other questions: revolved around the general direction of our movement. Some such question include:

“As Baptists in Association there is no doubt that we would have disagreement over many things if we dug down into the practical realities in our churches (e.g. women in leadership, 6 day creation etc). Is it possible that churches who hold a view that is not the majority view could still be valued, loved and associated with? As we do in relationships within families - we don't dis-associate. We keep in contact.”

“Are we at risk of establishing a majoritarian dictatorship where a bare majority can dictate the boundaries of the Association rather than seeking consensus?”

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER FEEDBACK YOU WOULD LIKE TO GIVE IN THIS PROCESS?

About the process so far:

Further feedback was given about the process going forward. This included such issues as:

- asking whether we heard from enough of a diversity of views on these issues
- raising pastoral concerns and the importance of the work of Taskforce 2 in the process
- the length of time it is taking to conclude this matter
- appreciation of the Forum process today

About the process going forward:

A number of participants made suggestions or asked questions about next steps, or expressed concern about the potential consequences of implementing the recommendations. This included such feedback as:

- ensuring the wider movement is aware of the depth of concern and potential unintended consequences of adopting the recommendations
- concerns about the impact of adopting these recommendations on pastoral and missional development
- concerns about pastors and churches leaving the Association and the impact of this on the Gen1K goal. An example of these comments is: *“How does the Association hope to function in the future with a percentage of churches and pastors having been forced out and a percentage of churches no longer having voting rights? Will the remainder have the capacity to fulfill the Association’s vision of 1000 healthy churches?”*