



## IMPORTANT NOTICE

### Referendum & Election

Please devote a few minutes to reading this and answering a few questions. Exercise your right to tell us what you want SAGA to be, how it should act, and how it should be structured.

### Why now?

Well, there are two main reasons. Firstly, SAGA's Trustees have been wearing two hats for too long now – as Trustees and as an acting National Council – so it is time for us, once again, to invite new heads and shoulders to form a revived National Council.

The second reason is that an active faction of members is voicing its discontent about matters of strategy and approach as well as about the 'two-hat' Trustees. The strategy/approach matters include SAGA's so-called 'meek acceptance' of firearms legislation (others have called it 'cowardly acceptance'), our lack of 'activism', our non-adherence to King III – i.e. a lack of (unspecified) 'good governance' ...

To help us find, and implement, satisfactory solutions to these difficulties the (acting) National Council (i.e. the Trustees) needs your input – which you can provide by participating in this "Referendum & Election". We cannot overstate the importance of your input and trust that this important notice will provide sufficient motivation/information to convince you to do so.

But first ...

### Structure

In the beginning ... Due largely to the political/legislative position of private ownership of firearms and their use at the time (1985), the founding of the Association was enthusiastically supported by good numbers of individuals, NGOs and firearm-related associations.

So much so that there were more than enough capable/dedicated volunteers to make the structures envisaged by SAGA's Founders perfectly workable.

The idea, as confirmed and put into effect via well-attended and publicized meetings held in the (then four) Provinces was briefly as follows:

**Regional/Provincial Committees** comprising of four to six members were elected by the paid-up members present at those meetings.

**Each Regional/Provincial Committee** then selected two of their number (often the chairman & secretary) to serve on the National Council.

**Proposals submitted by Regional Committees** were debated, amended, approved or rejected by the National Council.

**The National Council elected a small Executive Committee** to manage the day-to-day affairs of the Association and to be responsible to the Council for the implementation of approved policies/projects.

**The Trustees** sat with the National Council as observers/adjudicators so their knowledge of SAGA's institutional history could provide stability,

continuity and consistency. If, and only if, National Council decisions/projects/policies ventured beyond the bounds laid down in the Trust Deed, the Trustees could suggest amendments or, if necessary, overrule 'unconstitutional' decisions.

The Trust Deed (aka SAGA's 'Constitution') could be amended only by the Trustees. They could do so either for technical reasons(\*) or to comply with specific proposals put to the full membership – such as some of those in this document.

(\*) So far, the only amendment has been to comply with the Receiver of Revenue's requirement that the deed provide that no member (including any Trustee) could be a beneficiary of the Trust and, on dissolution, the Trust's assets would be transferred to an association or organization with objectives similar to those of the Trust.

While the fledgling association's main assets were to be (and still are) the goodwill of its members and the legitimacy and credibility of its activities, from the start it was considered necessary to ensure the long term tenure of the Trustees – but limit their power. Trustees can therefore be appointed, or removed, only by the Trustees. This was not only for the continuity aspect. The advantages of this approach were that it gave the Trustees some immunity from petty politicking, and could protect the Association in the event of an attempted *coups d'état*. Our initial low membership numbers and fees (R10 pa) made the Association a comparatively easy prey for even a small group of dissidents. A group perhaps with a hidden agenda or political objectives and a philosophy very different from that upon which the Trust was founded and established. (This was not just a fanciful thought – one such group wanted to do so but called off its attempt in about 1989/90.)

Although not perfect, this structure and the personalities involved, served SAGA well for a number of years so we refer to it as the 'Ideal Structure' (meaning with Regional and National committees).

### **Status Quo**

BUT ... Then there came a time when the internal strife became so serious that the Trustees had to step in, terminate a National Council meeting, and disband the Council. In accordance with the provisions of the Trust Deed, the Trustees were then required to take responsibility for the Council's functions – until fresh elections could be held and a new National Council put in place.

That temporary arrangement came into effect over ten years ago and, despite a couple of serious (and expensive) attempts to find sufficient willing and capable volunteers to get SAGA back to the 'Ideal Structure', we Trustees are still wearing those two hats. Not an ideal situation and not one the Trustees like or need. On the bright side, if such provisions had not been made, it is unlikely that your association would still exist.

### **What next?**

So, given new pressure to find solutions, the Trustees have again expended much time and effort (not to mention quite a bit of your money) to present you, via post and email (where applicable), with some options and to encourage all of you – not only the vocally disenchanted, but also the usually silent majority – to help decide SAGA's best way forward.

### **Internet/Virtual Structuring?**

As we now have email addresses for some 60% (and rising) of our members, you could choose to base our structure/s on Internet technology. By having 'electronic' elections and meetings, the inconvenience and the time and cost of travel could be minimized: e.g. a Cape

Regional Committee could be comprised of volunteers resident in far-flung corners of the Region. And, it could also be cost-effective to set up smaller Regional centres – where and when membership numbers/interest warrant them.

A drawback to this is that Regional Committee members would seldom see each other face-to-face and may only become known to each other through Internet or telephone ‘conferences’. Such an electronic system could discriminate against those who do not have personal/home Internet connections. Is this better or worse than not being able to participate because of time and distance?

As outlined above, one of the ‘Ideal Structure’s’ best features was that it required the direct involvement of members at Regional AGMs and National Council meetings – i.e. candidate Regional Committee members could introduce themselves before voting took place and the meetings themselves offered opportunities to exchange ideas and information, to meet like-minded people and receive and present feedback for the National Council.

But drawbacks to the ‘Ideal Structure’ made themselves evident after the initial groundswell of enthusiasm, and the sense of urgency, wilted a little. While membership numbers were still growing, the Regional meetings were being attended by fewer and fewer people. This was partly because members were satisfied that their interests were being well-enough looked after; that ‘other members’ would step into the breach; and also because of the time and cost of travel to the major centres – a great number of members are not urban-based and South Africa is a large country. Subsequent to the establishment of SAGA in 1985, the emergence in the 1990s of dedicated structures and associations for sports shooters, hunters and collectors also played a role in terms of the need for and function of Regional structures.

Another option, which we consider workable if an ‘Internet Only’ structure is accepted, would be to drop the whole Regional Committee concept and have all members, nation-wide, vote directly for candidates standing for the National Council.

If an ‘Internet Only’ option is chosen by members, the Trust Deed would have to be amended to suit.

Note: If as few as ten percent of you participate in this “Referendum & Election” that would make such ‘attendance’ higher than the total number of members (including Proxies) at the last series of Regional AGMs. If a quarter of that 10% offer themselves for election to Regional and/or direct National Committees, there would be more than sufficient volunteers to fill every seat on every Committee – provided the geographic spread of the candidates roughly matched those covered by each Region.

Please do not rely on others to respond to this important request – we would like a 100% response.

### **Objectives and Modus Operandi**

SAGA was established as what can best be described as a ‘Lobbying Association’. While we specifically undertook not to meddle in the affairs/territory of existing sport-shooter/hunter/collector/other associations, we have always worked to protect the rights of all classes of firearm owner (and the legitimate use of firearms) – from the one-self-protection-handgun owner with no association to call home, to the all-round-hunter-shooter who needs 50 firearms to participate in the shooting activities of his choosing and who may already be a member of a dozen associations.

While persistently challenging the unreasonable provisions and poor/discriminative administration of the firearms legislation (past and present), SAGA has accepted the reality of legislative controls – South Africa has had various forms of control for hundreds of years.

We have however worked hard to present our case in a responsible and reasonable manner so that the general public can see we, as responsible firearm owners, are not what the anti-gun (and some in government) paint us as – radicals who present a danger to society, those who possess inherently ‘evil’ firearms that have only one purpose – killing people.

Some of our members are not happy with this approach and want SAGA to become more active (aggressive?) – to an extent, more like America’s NRA. So, it’s fair to say they want SAGA to be an ‘Activist Association’ a term which may best describe a South African’s image of the NRA. The NRA certainly has a high profile; it is not backward about coming forward with public comment about gun matters and shootings, and they are quick to issue press releases and deliver speeches – like Charlton Heston’s matchless “... pry them from my cold dead hands” – strongly asserting America’s Second Amendment rights and denouncing anyone (especially a hapless politician) who supports some new ‘gun control’ measure.

Indeed, America’s anti-gun press often censures politicians and public officials for “cowering before the NRA’s power” and accuses the NRA of “fear-mongering”. Yes, the NRA has muscle, and often uses it very successfully from city level, through state level and right up to presidential level.

However we need to understand that the constitutional environment governing firearm ownership within the United States and within which the NRA operates is **fundamentally different** to the situation we have in South Africa. In the United States firearm ownership is a constitutional right, while in South Africa it is arguably a privilege. This fundamental difference is what has informed SAGA’s lobbying strategy over the years, and through which considerable success has been achieved in terms of persuading both the previous and present governments of the reality and legitimacy of responsible firearm owners of all disciplines.

I imagine NRA Board members regularly give thanks to America’s Founding Fathers for the Second Amendment which spells out the right to ‘keep and bear arms’. Within the USA Federal structure significant policy differences occur between States and it does **NOT have a ‘party list’ system like South Africa’s**. Unlike America’s, our system makes it about impossible for our voters/lobbyists to call individual vote-hungry politicians to account for their policy on any specific subject, and policy on such issues as firearm ownership is developed and implemented on a centralised basis.

Our lobbying efforts are therefore directed primarily where it counts most i.e. at central government and associated centralised bodies of influence such as the Central Firearm Registry.

This is one of the key factors which should be considered when debating the merits of a Regional or Centralised structure, and that we do need mechanisms for you to make inputs and let your voices be heard, and for SAGA to give you feedback on what is happening in the firearm governance and legislative space on a regular basis.

While SAGA can, and has engaged in legal action to protect firearm owners interests, such recourse is hugely expensive and we have therefore regarded it as a last rather than first resort once all other avenues have failed, and we advocate continuing to follow this approach.

We need your participation to ensure that this “Referendum & Election” will result in the establishment of a new, broadly representative, National Council. A Council empowered to 'get things going' in accordance with the options chosen by members. **DO IT TODAY.**

Please complete and return the Ballot Paper as soon as you can.

Kind regards,

SAGA Trustees