

NZARRA Head Judge Report AGM 23 May 2026 – Karen Birch

A warm welcome to all club representatives attending our Annual General Meeting. I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to all clubs and their members for their continued support, for our judges, scrutineers, and the exceptionally dedicated Executive team, all of whom give their time voluntarily and their efforts are essential to the smooth operation of our Association, our National Championships and club competitions.

At present, we have 26 National Association Judges, 6 Association Judges, and 6 Trainees. Given these modest numbers, we will need to initiate a recruitment campaign over the next 12 months to increase our trainee judging numbers.

Congratulations to Talieya Zainey and Jarrod Pivott who have progressed to National Association Judges and welcome back to Stacey Grootjans returning as a National Association Judge and Cory Grootjans returning as an Association judge.

My inaugural National Championship as Head Judge was a valuable test of my organisational abilities. In the lead up to the championship it was the arranging of the judge's rotation, then the completing, printing and collating the hundreds of coloured judging sheets, which I could not have done without Leila Maaka so a huge thank you for your significant assistance over a weekend.

At Senior Nationals we faced additional challenges when three members of the Judging Panel were unable to participate due to illness, I was notified the day before of the first ill judge, we had one judge leave on the Friday after the judge's workshop and another fell ill on the Saturday during the competition. I would like to express my gratitude to Glen Houlihan and Craig Campbell for stepping in at very short notice, and to Heather Blackburn who, despite her own ill health, resumed her judging duties after our third judge fell ill.

During the year, we received notifications regarding the retirements of Colleen Reece and Bryan Wales, each after many years of outstanding dedication to our dance community. We also received a judging resignation from Tyree Connor. The expertise, commitment, and knowledge of these three senior judges will be greatly missed, and on behalf of the judges, Executive, and club members, we all wish them every success in their future endeavours.

Sue Campbell has decided to step back from her national judging requirements but will remain as an Association Judge and we are all very pleased to retain Sue within our Judging fraternity, she has a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

In November, we held the judges Bi-annual Combined Workshop, we had nine apologies, but it was an outstanding attendance from the remaining judges. We also invited the Association President and Secretary to join us for the first time and their assistance with taking minutes, assisting with the voting process and their contribution to the discussions in relation to the upcoming Combined National competition was greatly appreciated.

The meeting commenced an hour early as everyone had arrived and we were able to address a comprehensive agenda early. The afternoon session saw the group divided into four smaller working groups, again we ran out of time, so we all returned to one main group

and the ongoing discussions were so productive that we agreed to extend the meeting by another additional hour.

The outcomes of the workshop discussions, developed into the judges' remits being presented at the AGM. All judges were invited to contribute, and a non-binding vote was conducted on several key points at the workshop. These were subsequently developed into action points, circulated for feedback, and finalised into the current remits. An additional Zoom meeting was held to formalise voting on the remits and therefore confirming the judges' support for the remits being presented today.

We also have two working groups currently in action, looking at a) the judges Exam, and b) Judges Dress Code and etiquette. 2026 is the year to hold 3 regional workshops for the judges and key topics that will be discussed as a follow up from the Combined workshop will be, a) Judges Code of Conduct, and b) an appointment of an Assistant Head Judge

As per the workshop actions, we now have a process for judges to apply for sabbatical leave for up to 12 months without this affecting their current judging status, and a process for judges returning to judging after leave. This new and confirmed process has now been added to Rule Book B.

All our judges are extremely hard working, many are dancers, coaches, active and supportive club / committee members. They all show their ongoing passion and dedication to our sport in whatever role they undertake.

The role of Head Judge carries responsibility and trust so I would like to acknowledge the input from past head judges and our senior judges for their guidance, knowledge and patience that they have shared not only with me but to all judges and club members.

Together at the AGM we will decide on the best outcome for our members, dancers and clubs and we are all trying our best to share our love of the music and dance to see the sport grow, develop and encourage new members. To do this we need to try new things and while change sometimes seems daunting or impossible, but we must at least give it a try.

Our first Combined National Championship in October will be an exciting time for us all and regardless of the outcome of the head judge voting I am so excited to be part of this new adventure

Kind regards

KB

Karen Birch

Head Judge NZARRA