

# AMALGAMATIONS AND LIAISONS

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Calliope, as the first harrier club not only on the North Shore but in the wider Auckland area, initially drew its members from all over the sparsely populated North Shore and in the early thirties even from Auckland itself. Harriers would make their way by ferry to run at Calliope. This latter activity was fairly short-lived as other harrier clubs quickly sprung up on the Auckland isthmus. On the Shore however Calliope remained the only harrier club right through to 1961 when Takapuna Athletic Club established a harrier section.

What follows impacted on the whole of the Calliope Club. In an effort to obtain first-class track facilities Calliope in 1958 joined with Takapuna Athletic Club, and two other sports bodies to form the North Shore Sports Association with the aim of establishing a stadium at Onewa Domain. Ron Wareham, who was personally involved in this initiative includes more detail on it in his anecdotes in this history. The initiative came to nothing. Nothing either came of Calliope's approach to Takapuna in 1966 suggesting the two clubs amalgamate into a North Shore athletic club. Takapuna's 440 yard track at Onewa Domain was a big attraction. In 1970 Calliope's Rev. D Taylor had to issue a denial that an amalgamation of the North Shore Club and Calliope was being considered. In reality what was happening was that the senior section of Calliope on an experimental basis only, was holding joint meetings with North Shore at Windsor Park. Amalgamation did not occur.

The Auckland Athletic Association in a directive in 1973 strongly recommended that Auckland's 35 clubs should be reduced to 12 clubs. The rationale was that the sport was dying and that clubs needed to combine to ensure viability. All the clubs on the Shore were to become one large club, but the children's sections of each club would remain as they were. Calliope's executive rejected the Centre's reasoning. Both Calliope and Takapuna clubs had had successful harrier seasons and their membership had grown. The executive felt there was no need for a merger. With 120,000 people on the North Shore two or three clubs could be supported. However, a month later Calliope, Navy, North Shore and Takapuna Clubs agreed in principle to amalgamate for the further advancement of athletics on the North Shore. A first-class track was needed on the Shore. The clubs did not amalgamate.

The next move was by the North Shore Club. In 1976 an approach was made to Calliope suggesting a merger into one club would be beneficial to both organizations. Jack Ralston at a meeting of the Calliope athletic section outlined the pros and cons. While a good case could be made for amalgamation in terms of regenerating enthusiasm both athletically and socially, Calliope had a name in New Zealand athletics and harriers with a

strong tradition and under no circumstances should the club consider losing its identity. The other clubs on the Shore were formed as breakaways from Calliope and the uniform (if combining was to take place) should be Calliope's colours as these were particularly distinctive with very few clubs running in black and white. Calliope, on balance, decided not to merge into one club. Dave Norris then called on Calliope to reconsider. North Shore Club offered its Windsor Park grounds as headquarters, it offered to use Calliope's uniform if that was Calliope's wish, and the name would be N.S.C. (North Shore Calliope). The children's sections would remain unchanged but instead of the clubs feeding athletes into their own small clubs, they would feed them into one powerful senior club. The merging of athletes, officials, coaches, facilities and assets would close gaps that were present in the individual clubs.

No amalgamation took place. However, soon afterwards in October 1976 an advertisement appeared in the North Shore Times Advertiser which gave the impression that the North Shore and Calliope Athletic Clubs had merged and were to compete as the N.S.C. Track and Field Club. This was untrue, but caused consternation within Calliope to those not in the know. What had happened was that the Calliope executive had agreed with the seniors that there should be no amalgamation, but that the seniors on a trial basis should compete at Windsor Park through the athletic season with the view to possibly combining at a later date. The Calliope president, Rev. D Taylor's report for 1976/77 had the following to say: "The move was fraught with mis-understandings, ill-conceived publicity, and a lack of appreciation of the problems and implications involved. The result was that while the seniors were running, way out at Windsor Park, the younger teenage groups had to be catered for on an ad hoc basis by members of the children's section committee." In June 1977, Calliope official Roy Bennett said that the experiment was not particularly successful, the joining of North Shore and Calliope not working as well as expected. It did not proceed.

Rationalisation was never far off the agenda and the National body was again pressing the issue in 1988. There was a drive to have fewer and stronger clubs. This had to be balanced against the desire of smaller clubs to preserve their identities. In July 1988 a meeting of combined North Shore athletic and harrier clubs resolved to set up coaching clinics for coaches and athletes. There was talk in November 1988 of clubs on the North Shore starting to think about breaking away from the Auckland Centre.

Nothing eventuated for quite a few years. However, in February 1997 North Shore Bays lost to Counties-

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Manukau at the National League Athletics final, North Shore Bays' first loss. This was part of the catalyst for what followed. As Dave Norris said, Counties had prevailed by doing exactly what Norris and Bays' president Graeme Avery had founded the League for, the combining of several smaller clubs into one strong unit. Norris went on: "We may not stay as a single entity after next year. We are exploring the possibility of amalgamating into a kind of umbrella club or super club. Ideally, this would encompass all existing clubs north of the bridge." Respected athlete and coach, Chris Pilone said in October 1997 that he favoured amalgamation for track, both financially and logistically, but that it shouldn't be the case for harrier clubs. Around this time the Northland Centre executive had approached Bays Cougars Club for assistance as the Centre needed help and support (source - Athletics North Annual Report 2001/2).

In a bold step it was suggested that a new Athletics Centre be established, Athletics North.

All sections of Calliope were consulted and in February 1998 Calliope Harrier section positively supported becoming involved as part of Athletics North. The proposal was that from April 1 1998 the southern boundary of Athletics Northland was to move south, ideally and logically to the Harbour Bridge. The new Centre would be called Athletics North. It would embrace the North Harbour Bays Club and all other North Shore clubs that wanted to be included as well as all the Northland clubs. The goal was to facilitate the development of the sport through the creation of strengthened club units. There were to be four levels with identical principles applying for all sections - track and field, harriers, childrens, veterans. One - club nights to be held by individual clubs. Two - Athletics North fixtures. Three - Northern region fixtures (Waikato, Counties-Manukau, Auckland, Athletics North). Four - National, where athletes would represent their individual clubs.

In April 1998, Trevor Mouldey, Calliope club president, notified the general manager of Athletics Auckland that Calliope Athletic and Harrier Club Inc was to be affiliated to Athletics North, effective immediately. A Special Meeting of Calliope had voted unanimously in favour of this move. Mouldey said "It is anticipated that this will bring a more unified approach to running on the North Shore and in Northland."

The new Centre did have drive, enthusiasm, and skills. There were made available planning workshops, coaching courses and clinics, officials courses and forums, technical advice, a development manual and coaching manuals. However, for Calliope Harrier Club nothing much seemed to change. Rather than run officially in the Auckland Centre cross country, road and relay championships, we now could run in the Athletics North equivalents. The club tended not to compete in the Athletics North cross country and relay events, but because the road championships were run in Auckland in conjunction with the Auckland Centre championships, Calliope harriers did turn out for this event. A visual presence and good results gave the club a high profile each year. Results in 2004 for instance were: R Legge 2nd Masters Women 50, J Ward 3rd Senior Men, P Hewson 2nd Masters Men 35,

K Kent 1st Masters Men 50, M Wade 2nd Masters Men 55, J Dwyer 1st Masters Men 60, T Jaggard 3rd Masters Men 60, G Barfoot 1st Masters Men 65. This is a positive. However, the influx of new members has not occurred, and there are practical problems, for example the simple but crucial one of obtaining the entry forms necessary to enter Calliope harriers in interclub races. This applies also to the children's section. The senior athletics section has virtually no communication at all with Athletics North.

Calliope Harrier section chairman Keith Kent made the point in 1999 that Calliope should strive for a stronger involvement with the Centre, thus allowing a stronger input. Possibly Calliope has not promoted itself sufficiently. Possibly for Calliope the emphasis in the Centre is in the wrong place. Possibly the Centre is too big geographically. Possibly the sport of harriers and athletics is just too hard to sell at present. Everyone will have their own views. Athletics North has within its ranks many talented, well-intentioned, and forward-thinking administrators. Possibly better co-ordination is all that is required.

