

2014 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

DATE: Wednesday 15 October 2014
TIME: 7pm
VENUE: German Tivoli Club – 291 Dandenong Road, Windsor

1. Formal matters

1.1. Chair for the meeting

Meredith Doig was nominated to chair the meeting.

Moved: Rod Bower

Seconded: Jonathan Meddings

1.2. Apologies

58 – Leharna Black
207 – Peter Trebilco
343 – Derek O’Reilly
491 – Ian Robinson
673 – William and Barbara Darvall
1130 – Peter Ellerton
1135 – Anthony Englund

1.3. Proxies

Thirty-four proxies were received as follows:

<u>Member</u>	<u>In Favour Of</u>
12 – Tracey Burgess	Meredith Doig
26 – Graham Pitts	Meredith Doig
58 – Leharna Black	Meredith Doig
63 – Simon Bereux	Meredith Doig
73 – Graziano Birgi	Meredith Doig
86 – Rex Williams	Meredith Doig
133 – Jason Ball	Meredith Doig
140 – Warren Bonett	Meredith Doig
151 – Terry Kelly	Meredith Doig
165 – Aziz Islam	Meredith Doig
207 – Peter Trebilco	Meredith Doig
223 – Alan McPhate	Meredith Doig
243 – Lorene Gottschalk	Meredith Doig

291 – Robert Bourne	Meredith Doig
343 – Derek O'Reilly	Meredith Doig
352 – Bodye Darvill	Meredith Doig
388 – David Freeman	Meredith Doig
393 – Graeme Lindenmayer	Meredith Doig
462 – Lyle Allan	Meredith Doig
491 – Ian Robinson	Meredith Doig
504 – Frank Jung	Meredith Doig
520 – Beatrice Faust	Meredith Doig
671 – John Turner	Meredith Doig
683 – Trevor Lee	Meredith Doig
846 – David Muschamp	Meredith Doig
959 – Alice Carr	Meredith Doig
1092 – Dierk von Behrens	Meredith Doig
1116 – Colin Kline	Meredith Doig
1135 – Anthony Englund	Meredith Doig
1205 – Adam Ford	Meredith Doig
1220 – Mark Armstrong-Roper	Meredith Doig
1392 – Elizabeth Needham	Meredith Doig
1424 – Brett Connolly	Meredith Doig
1424 – Jacque Connolly	Meredith Doig

1.4. Quorum

Under current Rules, quorum is achieved by at least 10% members in attendance in person or by proxy. The following thirteen financial Members being in attendance along with 34 proxy votes, a quorum was declared and the AGM was officially declared open at 19:15.

Lyn Allison	Ken Davidson
John Perkins	Diane Preston
Wal Parker	Chris Fotinopoulos
Rod Bower	Meredith Doig
Charl Nienebar	Tania Rook
Jonathan Meddings	Sam Mason-Smith
Lesley Vick	

2. Minutes of the previous AGM

Minutes of the 2013 AGM had been previously circulated with the Notice of the 2014 AGM. It was recommended that the 2013 Minutes be accepted as a true and correct record:

Moved: Lyn Allison
Seconded: Jonathan Meddings
Carried.

3. Business arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the 2013 AGM minutes.

Previous RSA President Lesley Vick asked that the incoming Committee consider the following matters for the FY14 year:

- Freedom of expression – proposed amendments to section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act are a limitation on freedom of speech. RSA needs to look at the matter and make a stand.
- Dying with Dignity. Lesley asked the RSA to contribute its support to urging a satisfactory legislative outcome in the lead up to the next Victorian state election in 2014. She offered to liaise with Meredith on this matter. Lesley Vick is currently President of Dying with Dignity and Lyn Allison is an Ambassador.

4. Reports

4.1. **President's report**

This year has been marked by major progress in the campaign to rid Victorian public schools of the divisive, disruptive and discriminatory Special Religious Instruction (SRI), thanks largely to the great grassroots work of parents' group FIRIS (Fairness in Religion in Schools). RSA has contributed by writing to the Education Minister, speaking with senior bureaucrats and supporting FIRIS financially.

We have also begun working on a major new initiative called "The Reason Project", aimed at raising the use of reason and reasoning in private and public realms.

From a management perspective, we have established an Admin Subcommittee to enable the main Committee to be more "mission-focused" and settled on a prudent investment strategy. The website is improved, with more regular additions, RSA Daily continues to update subscribers of current issues, and the *Australian Rationalist* continues to provide a high quality forum for the general public.

Campaigns

National curriculum

RSA made a submission to the Review of the National Curriculum; President Meredith Doig was interviewed on ABC TV and had articles published.

In February, we met with representatives of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) to discuss how Victoria will 'translate' the National Curriculum into a Victorian context. Among other things, the VCAA will formally assess the National Curriculum's General Capabilities (which include Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding), ensuring schools do not ignore these important cross-curriculum features.

In July, we learned the VCAA is developing a new "General Religious Education" (GRE) course. We urged them to include teaching about ethics in this course, and alerted them to the very good Quebec Ethics and Religious Cultures Program.

Special Religious Instruction (Vic)

RSA has been collaborating with grassroots parent's group FIRIS on the campaign to rid Victorian government schools of Special Religious Instruction (SRI). We have published articles about this in *Australian Rationalist*; repeatedly written to the Education Minister and consulted with the Education Department's senior bureaucrats. In our view, whichever side of politics is voted in at the November State election should immediately establish a Committee of key religious and non-religious stakeholders to conduct a major public consultation about the place of religion in public education. There has not been such an exercise since the Russell Review of the early 1970s, and it's clear one is needed. Public anger and

media commentary about the role of SRI and organisations like ACCESS Ministries in Victoria, Scripture Union in Qld and GenR8 in NSW will not subside until their form of aggressive evangelism is removed from public schools.

In October, President Meredith Doig shared a platform at the Australian Association for Religious Education conference with representatives from ACCESS Ministries, Scripture Union, Arkan Toledo (Islamic SRI) and UJEB (Jewish SRI).

Census

In March, RSA was invited to meet with representatives of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to discuss possible revisions to the “Religion Question” in the next census. We now know the next census is most likely to revise this question so that “No religion” is the first option respondents can choose.

Dying with Dignity

In August, RSA made a submission to the Federal Government on the Medical Services (Dying with Dignity) Bill, supporting the introduction of legislation to legalise physician-assisted dying.

Projects

The *Reason Project* is a major new initiative arising out of our forward plan. A project team has been meeting during the year, crystallising what this might mean in practice. It will include a website that:

- Provides simple, concise notes on the history and contemporary use of Reason and Reasoning
- Provides tools for critical thinking, for use in personal or public spheres
- Brings together blogs written by those who exemplify the practical use of Reason and Reasoning in the public sphere
- Provides a curated list of critical thinking resources, ranging from the popular to the serious.

A further aspect of the Reason Project will be gradual development of a “Reason Institute”, a virtual grouping of people who exemplify critical thinking in areas of interest to the freethought community.

Communications

Journal

We continue to publish the *Australian Rationalist* under the editorship of professional journalist David James. The year’s four issues featured cover stories on: the Anthroposphere: living in a manmade Earth (Dec 2013); Transhumanism; where is homo sapiens headed? (March 2014); Time: an examination of some strange mysteries (June 2014); and Planet of the Watched: has digital surveillance robbed us of privacy? (Sept 2014).

Daily newsletter

And we continue to publish *RSA Daily*, our daily round-up of articles of interest to rationalists from Australia and abroad. It now has 167 subscribers and nearly 9,000 views.

Website

The website is now easier to navigate, with our major areas of interest: Secular Education, Secular Government, Human Rights, Science in Society and Reflections. Posts are more regular and are listed under the major headings in chronological order.

Occasional emails

And we sent out 20 occasional emails during the year.

Administration

This year we established an Admin Subcommittee to focus on administrative matters, leaving the main Committee free to concentrate on “mission-focused” matters. The Admin Subcommittee comprises the Officers of the Society (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer) plus the Society’s Accountant and Membership Secretary.

A plan for future activities, drafted up by Treasurer Anthony Englund, included the idea of a “Reason Project”, reported on elsewhere.

Investments

The Society’s funds are governed by an Investment Committee, comprising the President and Treasurer and two professionally qualified independent experts, reporting to the main Committee.

Following advice from three financial advisory firms, the Investment Committee put in place a “core + satellite” investment strategy that allocates approximately 75% of the Society’s funds to a growth-oriented index fund and approximately 25% of the funds to a small set of complementary investments comprising some blue chip shares and some exchange traded funds (ETFs).

The Investment Committee meets quarterly to review the Society’s investments, making adjustments as required.

Collaboration with other groups

The RSA has worked with a number of other freethought groups during the year.

We have been a foundational member of SECOA (the Secular Coalition of Australia), convened by former RSA Committee member Rod Bower and WA Humanist Society Committee member Jaye Christie. In February we participated in a SECOA workshop, hosted by the Sydney Atheists, which focused on Secular Education in Australia.

RSA have provided supportive funding to the Young Australian Skeptics to assist young authors. We have also made donations towards Ron Williams’ legal costs in fighting his second High Court case against the National Schools Chaplaincy Program; to FIRIS to help its SRI campaigning; and to “Plain Reason” in South Australia to help with their survey of religion in SA public schools.

International Support

The RSA has been active this year raising funds to help build a permanent home for the Kasese Humanist Primary School (KHPS) in Uganda. As a result, the KHPS has been able to build a freethought library/computer room as part of its new school.



Dr Meredith Doig

Moved that the President's report be received: Sam Mason-Smith

Seconded: John Perkins

Carried.

4.2. Secretary's report

The Secretary lodged the amended Rules approved by Members at the 2013 AGM. These were accepted by Consumer Affairs Victoria 20.01.2014.

A question was raised whether the President also holding the Secretary position represented a conflict of interest. Section 76 of the Associations Incorporation Reform (AIR) Act says "The secretary of an incorporated association may, unless the rules of the association provide otherwise, hold any other office in the association." It was noted that the office of Secretary under the AIR Act is equivalent to the Public Officer under the previous Act.

A further comment was made that a person holding the position of treasurer should not be allowed to hold any other office bearer position.

The Membership Secretary, Tania Rook, reported that the RSA currently has 408 members, down from 480 at the same time last year. Of these, 44 are new members in the 1314 financial year, up from 29 in the 1314 year.

New memberships were gained in the following manner:

- 25 – website
- 9 – journal
- 3 – brochures
- 7 – other

Membership renewals are still predominantly driven by contact via email or letter (76%). However, towards the end of the year we saw the beginning of automated PayPal renewals (5%). For the 1415 year and beyond, we expect this figure to increase and to mean a greater member retention rate. 10% of renewals were based on receipt of the journal and a further 9% came from unknown sources.

Moved that the Secretary's report be received: Tania Rook

Seconded: Rod Bower

Carried.

4.3. Treasurer's report

In the absence of the Treasurer (resident in Sydney), the President read out the following statement on his behalf:

The FY 2013/14 balance sheet and income and expenditure statements prepared by [RSA accountant] Ken [Wright] are consistent with my knowledge of the opening balances and transactions made throughout the year. They also appropriately reflect the changes to the investment strategies agreed by the Investment Committee. The RSA stood in good stead as at 30 June 2014 with healthy net assets of \$811,020 and a net surplus of \$33,495 for the financial year.

Many thanks to Ken for his efforts in acting as the RSA's accountant during the year.

Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. Balance Sheet As of June 2014

Assets			
Current Assets			
Cash On Hand			
Comsec Investment A/c	\$10		
RSA Admin	\$40,173		
Paypal	\$1,061		
Total Cash On Hand		<u>\$41,244</u>	
Total Current Assets			\$41,244
Investments			
mecu T/D 9/5/15 5.75%	\$127,000		
ANZ Bank ord. shares	\$19,969		
NAB ord shares	\$20,409		
WBC ord shares	\$19,793		
Vanguard Growth Index Fund	\$507,615		
Vanguard US Total Market ETF	\$39,979		
Vanguard World ex-US SharesETF	\$35,011		
Total Investments		<u>\$769,776</u>	
Total Assets			\$811,020
Liabilities			
Net Assets			<u>\$811,020</u>
Equity			
RAA equity		\$606,136	
J R Howard bequest		\$160,094	
Retained Earnings		\$11,296	
Current Year Surplus/Deficit		<u>\$33,495</u>	
Total Equity			<u>\$811,020</u>

The President explained that the Society's investments are recorded *at cost price* in the financial statements. The *market value* of the Society's investments as at 13.08.2014 was \$834,841.

RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA Inc.

Income and Expenditure Statement

1 July 2013 through 30 June 2014

Income

Investment income		
Investment a/c interest	3,520	
Term deposit interest	21,899	
Dividend income	5,251	
Fund distributions	7,615	
Gain on sales of investments	37,500	75,785
Operating a/c interest		1,565
Membership fees		6,627
Donations		1360
Journal subscriptions, sales, royalties		1227
Total income		86,564

Expenditure

Journal costs		
Editor's fees	15,000	
Authors and contributors	2,455	
Printing journal	13,668	
Journal postage & mailing	2,952	34,075
Event		
Journal relaunch		393
Support for good causes		
FIRIS	1000	
Atheism SA Inc	349	
Kasese Humanist School	500	
High Court Appeal	1000	2,849
Marketing		
Brochures, leaflets		690
Other expenses		
Accounting	440	
Admin Officer's fee	2,332	
Meeting expenses	250	
Office supplies	214	
Paypal charges	101	
P O Box	107	
Postage	663	
President's honorarium	10,000	
Statutory report	127	
Website maintenance	828	15,062
Total expenditure		53,069
Net surplus		33,495

The President explained that, as a Tier 1 organisation, there is no obligation for the RSA's financial statements to be audited or cross-checked by an independent qualified financial professional, unless Members so require. There was a suggestion that the cost of an audit be investigated and a search be made to find an independent financial professional to review the financial statements. It was further asked that 2 years of data be presented at the AGM, for comparative purposes.

Moved that the Treasurer's report be received: Sam Mason-Smith

Seconded: Jonathan Meddings
Carried.

5. Election of a Committee

Nominations for the Committee were received from the following Members:

1. John Perkins
2. Jonathan Meddings
3. Chris Fotinopoulos
4. Peter Ellerton
5. Anthony Englund
6. Meredith Doig
7. Rohan Kapitany
8. Diane Preston
9. Lyn Allison

There being no other nominations, the Chair declared these Members duly elected to the RSA Committee of Management until the next AGM. The two new members, Chris Fotinopoulos and John Perkins, were formally welcomed to the committee.

6. Any other business

A comment was made that the journal is really good and should continue to be offered in printed form. The President confirmed there is currently no plan to stop printing the journal in hard copy.

7. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 19:50.

Tania Rook

Administration Officer

Date: 18.10.2014