

# 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

**DATE:** Thursday 8 October 2015  
**TIME:** 7:30 pm  
**VENUE:** Hawksburn Hotel – 505 Malvern Road, Toorak

## 1. Formal matters

### 1.1. Chair for the meeting

At 19:35, the President announced that due to circumstances beyond our control, it would be necessary to start the meeting later than advertised. There were no objections to this. The meeting opened at 20:41.

It was moved that Meredith Doig chair the AGM.

**Moved:** Jonathan Meddings **Seconded:** Chris Fotinopoulos. **Motion carried.**

### 1.2. Apologies

18 Rohan Kapitany  
276 Ron Thompson  
491 Ian Robinson  
687 Hugh Harris  
1130 Peter Ellerton  
1135 Anthony Englund

### 1.3. Proxies

**Total Proxies: 40**

1: In favour of Chairperson (Meredith Doig)

1: In favour of Jonathan Meddings

2: in favour of Tania Rook

36: in favour of Meredith Doig

#### Member

18 Rohan Kapitany  
50 Phillippa Gavranich  
51 Ronal Manser  
65 Stuart Rawlinson

#### In Favour Of

Meredith Doig  
Meredith Doig  
Meredith Doig  
Meredith Doig

73	Graziano Birgi	Meredith Doig
78	Daniel Mark Varney	Meredith Doig
80	Fiona Patten	Meredith Doig
88	Craig Sankey	Meredith Doig
93	Steve Davies	Meredith Doig
102	Richard Clifford	Meredith Doig
110	Brian Morris	Meredith Doig
165	Aziz Islam	Meredith Doig
183	Valerie Bourke	Meredith Doig
205	Rex Williams	Meredith Doig
207	Peter Trebilco	Chairperson
208	Walter Frank	Tania Rook
220	Kenneth Davidson	Meredith Doig
220	Lesley Vick	Meredith Doig
310	Brian Salter-Duke	Meredith Doig
342	Victor Stevens	Meredith Doig
343	Derek O'Reilly	Meredith Doig
355	Kenneth Oastler	Meredith Doig
361	Graham McGill	Jonathan Meddings
383	Trevor Lee	Meredith Doig
388	David Freeman	Meredith Doig
421	Brendan Murphy	Meredith Doig
460	Charl Nienaber	Meredith Doig
462	Lyle Allan	Meredith Doig
463	Tony Krins	Meredith Doig
474	Ian McDonald	Meredith Doig
483	Raymond Broughton	Meredith Doig
491	Ian Robinson	Meredith Doig
507	Lester Peters	Meredith Doig
669	Shaun McCarthy	Meredith Doig
957	Rob Barrow	Meredith Doig
999	Michael Sorokin	Tania Rook
1135	Anthony Englund	Meredith Doig
1392	Elizabeth Needham	Meredith Doig
1424	Brett Connolly	Meredith Doig
1424	Jacqui Connolly	Meredith Doig

## 1.4. Quorum

According to the Rules of the RSA last approved in 2014, 39 members (10% of the financial membership) are required for quorum. Having received 40 proxy votes and with 23 members in attendance, quorum was achieved.

### Members Present at the meeting

52	Sam Mason-Smith
119	Hugh Wilbur-Ham
134	Hugh Sarjeant
135	Gary Morris
138	Nevena Spirovska

159	Diane Preston
191	John Perkins
218	Ken Wright
390	Meredith Doig
411	Lyn Allison
494	Robert Traill
506	David Stimson
545	Leonard Buller
629	Rohan Navaratne
673	William Darvall
673	Barbara Darvall
679	Robert van de Graaf
677	Richard Perera
781	Tania Rook
892	Chris Fotinopoulos
1181	Rod Bower
1277	Robert Koster
1296	Jonathan Meddings

#### **In Attendance**

Vicky Koster

Marieke van de Graaf

## **2. Minutes of the previous AGM**

Minutes of the 2014 AGM had been previously circulated with the Notice of the 2015 AGM. It was moved that the 2014 Minutes be accepted as a true and correct record:

**Moved: Lyn Allison. Seconded: John Perkins. Carried.**

## **3. Business arising from the Minutes**

At last year's AGM, requests were made for the Committee to address two issues in the forthcoming year:

- Freedom of expression – proposed amendments to section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.
- Dying with Dignity – urging a satisfactory legislative outcome in the lead up to the next Victorian state election in 2014.

Both these issues were the subject of submissions made by the RSA during the year.

There was also a suggestion that the Committee investigate the cost of an audit, or a review by an independent financial professional. (As a "Tier 1" organisation, the RSA is not required to be audited nor to have financial statements checked by an independent financial professional, unless requested by Members.) Should Members want an audit or independent review, estimates of the costs involved are:

- Full audit – around \$4,500 to \$5,000
- Independent review – around \$1,000 to \$1,500.

## 4. Reports

### 4.1. **President's report**

The past year has seen great achievements in some of our longstanding campaigns. The new Minister for Education in Victoria announced that Special Religious Instruction will be shifted from class-time to before or after school, or during lunchtime, and also announced a future curriculum that will teach about the five major world religions and secular humanism and rationalism. These are both policies the RSA has been pursuing for many years.

Also, the Australian Bureau of Statistics announced it would change the format of the “Religion Question” for the next census, bringing the “No Religion” choice from the bottom to the top of the options list. Again, a reform the RSA has been seeking for many years.

In June and July, we organised a highly successful, ten city tour by Professor Peter Boghossian, an outspoken and controversial advocate of atheism and clear thinking. Next year we will be collaborating with the great young entrepreneurs at Think Inc. on the Sam Harris tour they are organising for January 2016.

And during the year, the RSA made submissions on End of Life Choices, Australian Citizenship, Adoption by Same Sex Couples, Australia's Future Tax System, Human Rights and Responsibilities, Dying with Dignity, Safe Access Zones and the Human Rights Commission's Freedom of Religion Roundtable.

### **Campaigns**

#### ***Special Religious Instruction (Vic)***

In Victoria, the Education Minister James Merlino, announced that arrangements for SRI will be changed so that it no longer takes up valuable teaching time during normal classroom time. Schools will be able to schedule SRI before or after school, or during lunchtimes, and we are continuing to lobby the Government to ensure such sessions are properly monitored.

The Government also announced new curriculum in what was called ‘world cultures’ in the press releases, but is actually curriculum about the five major world religions plus rationalism and secular humanism. The RSA was instrumental in ensuring the long and rich tradition of rationalist philosophies was included.

#### ***Special Religious Education (NSW)***

The RSA continued supporting grassroots parents' group Fairness in Religions in School (FIRIS) in its campaign to expose SRE materials that contain anti-LGBTI and ‘purity culture’ messages, contrary to NSW Education Department own standards.

#### ***Dying with Dignity***

The RSA put in submissions to the Federal Medical Services (Dying with Dignity) bill and the Victorian parliament's inquiry into End of Life Choices. RSA President Meredith Doig was elected to the board of Dying with Dignity Victoria.

### ***Prayers before Parliament***

In February, newly elected MLA Fiona Patten invited the RSA to a new event – a morning tea to mark the beginning of the parliamentary year, an alternative to the traditional church service. We took this opportunity to write and read out an Alternative to Prayers before Parliament, and this was so well received that Fiona had it professionally printed and distributed to all member of the Victorian parliament. A positive reception by the President of the Upper House might see the Christian Lord's Prayer being rotated with prayers and invocations from other religious and non-religious traditions.

### **Projects**

Following slow progress of The Reason Project, the Committee agreed it needed a person dedicated to moving it forward. Funds have now been allocated in the forward budget to secure the services of a suitable project leader.

### **Communications**

#### ***Tours***

In June and July 2015, the RSA organised a ten city tour for Professor Peter Boghossian, author of *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, collaborating with the Sydney Atheists, Central Victorian Atheists and Freethinkers, Launceston Skeptics, the Reason Road (Adelaide), the WA Humanists, the Brisbane Skeptics, Human Rights Advocacy Australia (Newcastle), Canberra Humanists, the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists, and the City Bible Forum. Apart from the impact on the audiences for these events, the tour generated 17 media interviews (see our website for details).

Through a collaborative relationship with event managers Think Inc, the RSA has negotiated the opportunity to distribute its journal to audiences, estimated to be around 15,000, for the forthcoming Sam Harris tour in January 2016. Think Inc. has been responsible for increasingly successful events featuring Neil deGrasse Tyson, Dr Cornell West, James Randi, and Professor Michio Kaku.

#### ***Public meetings***

We have been aware for some time of the need to provide members and other like-minded individuals the chance to meet and discuss rationalist topics of interest. In September, one of our long term members volunteered to organise such meetings for Melbourne using the Meetup software and this looks to be a promising initiative. We look forward to RSA members in other cities volunteering to organise similar meetings around the country.

#### ***Journal***

We continue to publish the Australian Rationalist on a quarterly basis under the editorship of professional journalist David James. This year featured cover stories on the supernatural (*Extra Sensory Deception*, vol 95, Summer 2014); euthanasia (*50 Shades of Suicide*, vol 96, Autumn 2015); free speech (*Je Suis Talking*, vol 97, Winter 2015) and moral dilemmas (*The Expedient Country*, vol 98, Spring 2015).

The RSA has been approached by its sister organisation, the New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists, to discuss the possibility of extending the reach of our journal to cover New Zealand. This will be further discussed over the coming months.

### ***RSA Daily***

Our daily curated bulletin RSA Daily continues to attract subscribers, up to 309 (last year 167) and 16,000 views (last year 9,000).

### ***Website***

Reader access to the website has increased to 6,600 views in Sept 2015 (up from 717 views last Sept), with a peak of 13,000 views in June. While we have posted regular articles, there has been no major update to the website over the past year.

### ***Social media***

The RSA maintains a Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn presence but these tend to be passive rather than active.

### ***Occasional emails***

And we sent out 22 occasional newsletters during the year.

### ***Administration***

The Committee has met every two months during the year, with the Admin Subcommittee and the Investment Committee meeting on a quarterly basis.

On Good Friday (3 April 2015), the Australian Securities and Investments Commission finally deregistered the Rationalist Association of Australia (RAA). This brings to a close the extensive dispute with the former Company Secretary and Investment Manager of the RAA that began in March 2011. The successful settlement of that dispute saw the (remaining) funds of the RAA transferred to the RSA, and a proper system of governance put in place.

### ***Investments***

The Society's funds continue to be governed by an Investment Committee, comprising the President and Treasurer and two professionally qualified independent experts, reporting to the main Committee. Following a prudent "passive" investment policy, our funds have grown steadily over the past year.

### ***Appreciation***

At this AGM three members of the committee are retiring. We record our appreciation to Lyn Allison, who has been Vice President of the RSA for seven years, since 2009; Anthony Englund, who has been our Treasurer for three years, since 2013; and Peter Ellerton, who has also been on the committee for three years.

**Moved that the President's report be received: Meredith Doig. Seconded: Lyn Allison. Carried.**

## 4.2. Secretary's report

The Society submitted its statutory report to the Victorian Consumer Affairs Department on time last year.

The RSA's Membership Secretary reported that:

- Current members: 445 – up from 408 at the same time last year.
- New memberships in 1415 financial year – 40 (last year was 44, so about the same)
- 27 – website
- 4 – journal
- 2 – brochures
- 4 – other
- 3 – gift subscriptions.

Membership renewals are still predominantly driven by contact via email (41%) or letter (27%). Automated PayPal renewals are now at 19%, up from 5% last year. Three percent of renewals were based on receipt of the journal and a further 11% come from unidentifiable sources.

In response to a question about the number of memberships vs the amount of membership fees noted in the financial statements, it was explained that there are four categories of membership and a number of “freebies”:

255	Single Membership
102	Single Concession
25	Couple Membership
6	Couple Membership (concession)
3	Gift Subscription
6	Journal subscription only
<b>397</b>	

23	Freebies
11	Journalists
1	Lifetime Member
8	Sister organisations
5	Super Administrator
<b>48</b>	

That means, as at 30.06.2015, there were around 40% of memberships being chased for payment. Overdue members are given three reminders to pay the membership fee before being deleted from the membership list.

**Moved that the Secretary's report be received: Tania Rook. Seconded: Rod Bower. Carried.**

## 4.3. Treasurer's report

Treasurer Anthony Englund reported that the 2014/15 accounts continue to demonstrate the strength of the RSA's financial position. Excluding the one-off gain on sale of investment in 2013/14, the RSA's income remained steady while expenses rose only marginally and controllably. A net surplus of \$9,087 was achieved for the year. The RSA's balance sheet remains strong with net assets increasing by just over \$11,000 to \$822,879 with all but \$2,865 of this

equity. My thanks as always to Ken Wright for his tireless work in maintaining the RSA's financial accounts and preparing the statements.

RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA Inc.

	Balance Sheet at 30 June 2015		Balance Sheet at 30 June 2014	
<b>Assets</b>				
Current Assets				
Cash On Hand				
RSA Admin Account	5,914		40,173	
ME Bank Term Deposit	148,907			
Paypal	1,401		1,061	
Comsec Account			10	
Total Cash On Hand		156,223		41,244
Accounts receivable		6,998		
DRP residues		26		
Total Current Assets		163,247		41,244
Investments at Cost				
mecu term deposit 9/5/15			127,000	
ANZ ordinary shares		19,969	19,969	
NAB ordinary shares		21,175	20,409	
WBC ordinary shares		19,793	19,793	
Vanguard Growth Index Fund		598,794	507,615	
Vanguard World ex-US Shares ETF			35,011	
Vanguard US Total Market ETF			39,979	
Total Investments at Cost		659,732		769,776
<b>Total Assets</b>		<b>822,979</b>		<b>811,020</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>				
Accounts payable		2,865		
<b>Equity</b>				
RAA Equity		606,141	606,141	
J R Howard Bequest		160,094	160,094	
Retained Earnings		44,791	11,290	
Current Year Surplus/Deficit		9,088	33,495	811,020
<b>Total Liabilities and Equity</b>		<b>822,979</b>		<b>811,020</b>

**RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA Inc.**

**Income and Expenditure Statement**

	<b>1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015</b>		<b>1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014</b>	
<b>Income</b>				
Investment income				
Commsec account interest	668		3,520	
Term deposit interest	21,958		21,899	
Dividend income	7,291		5,251	
Fund distributions	10,318		7,615	
Gain on sales of investments	5,500	45,735	37,500	75,785
Operating a/c interest		656		1,565
Membership fees		11,805		6,627
Donations		3,270		1,360
Journal subscriptions, sales, royalties		5,330		1,227
Events				
Boghossian tour		473		
<b>Total income</b>		<b>67,269</b>		<b>86,564</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>				
Journal costs				
Editor's fees	15,000		15,000	
Authors and contributors	1,075		2,455	
Printing journal	16,294		13,668	
Journal postage & mailing	3,802	36,171	2,952	34,075
Events				
Journal relaunch				393
Support for good causes				
FIRIS	1,000		1,000	
Atheism SA Inc			349	
Kasese Humanist School			500	
High Court Appeal			1,000	
Dying with Dignity	1,000			
Civil Liberties NSW	200	2,200		2,849
Marketing				
AARE Conference	50			
Brochures, leaflets	865			690
Facebook advertising	163	1,078		
Collaborations				
Young Australian Skeptics		1,605		
Other expenses				
Accounting	495		440	
Admin Officer's fee	2,332		2,332	
Bank charges	30			
Meeting expenses	100		250	
Office supplies & software	267		214	
Paypal charges, expense	158		101	
P O Box	115		107	
Postage	508		663	
President's honorarium	10,000		10,000	
Printing (non-journal)	72			
Statutory report	53		127	
Website development	2,568		828	
Website hosting & maintenance	430	17,128		15,062
<b>Total expenditure</b>		<b>58,182</b>		<b>53,069</b>
<b>Net surplus</b>		<b>9,087</b>		<b>33,495</b>

*The RSA is the oldest freethought group in Australia, promoting reason since 1906. Members and supporters hold that all significant beliefs and actions should be based on reason and evidence, that the natural world is the only world there is, and that answers to the key questions of human existence are to be found only in that natural world. We seek to stimulate freedom of thought, support a secular and ethical system of education, promote the fullest possible use of science for human welfare, and encourage interest in science, criticism and philosophy as connected factors in a progressive human culture.*

**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:

18	Rohan Kapitany
134	Hugh Sarjeant
138	Nevena Spirovska
159	Diane Preston
191	John Perkins
390	Meredith Doig
687	Hugh Harris
892	Chris Fotinopoulos
1181	Rod Bower
1296	Jonathan Meddings

Hugh Sarjeant was judged ineligible as his membership of the Society had not been circulated for approval by the committee at least 10 days prior to nominating for the Committee.

The Chair declared the remaining nine nominees duly elected.

## 6. Any other business

There was no other business.

## 7. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 21:42.

Tania Rook

Administration Officer

Date: 12.10.2015

## Regarding the Financial Statements

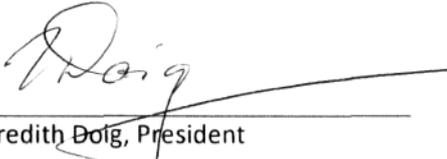
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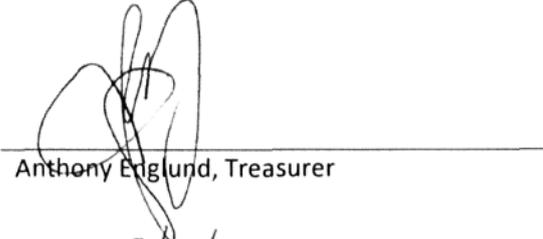
This financial report is a special purpose financial report prepared in order to satisfy the financial reporting requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act Victoria.

The Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. is a "Tier 1" entity, and as such, is not required to have these financial statements audited, or cross-checked by an independent qualified financial professional, unless the Members in General Meeting so require.

We, Meredith Doig, President, and Anthony Englund, Treasurer, being members of the Committee of the Rationalist Society of Australia Inc, certify that the financial statements set out in this report :

1. Present a true and fair view of the financial position of the Rationalist Society of Australia Inc, during and at the end of the financial year of the association ending 30 June 2015.
2. At the time of this statement, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

  
Meredith Doig, President

  
Anthony Englund, Treasurer  
28/8/15.

Dated: