

2013 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

DATE: Thursday 21 November 2013
TIME: 8pm
VENUE: Graduate House – 220 Leicester Street, Carlton.

1. Formal matters

1.1. Chair for the meeting

Rod Bower nominated Meredith Doig to be chair for the Annual General Meeting.

Seconded: John Perkins

Carried.

1.2. Apologies

No apologies were received.

1.3. Proxies

Twenty-four proxies were received. Directions for voting on the motion circulated with the Notice of Meeting were:

<u>Member</u>	<u>In Favour Of</u>	<u>Voting</u>
63 Simon Bereux	Meredith Doig	In favour
73 Graziano Birgi	Meredith Doig	No direction
86 Rex Williams	Meredith Doig	No direction
133 Jason Ball	Meredith Doig	In favour
140 Warren Bonett	Meredith Doig	No direction
151 Terry Kelly	Meredith Doig	No direction
165 Aziz Islam	Meredith Doig	No direction
243 Lorene Gottschalk	Meredith Doig	No direction
291 Robert Bourne	Meredith Doig	No direction
343 Derek O'Reilly	Meredith Doig	In favour
352 Bodye Darvill	Meredith Doig	In favour
388 David Freeman	Meredith Doig	As per proxy
393 Graeme Lindenmayer	Meredith Doig	No direction
491 Ian Robinson	Meredith Doig	No direction
520 Beatrice Faust	Meredith Doig	In favour
1116 Colin Kline	Meredith Doig	In favour
1130 Peter Ellerton	Meredith Doig	No direction

1135 Anthony Englund	Meredith Doig	In favour
1220 Mark Armstrong-Roper	Meredith Doig	In favour
1263 David James	Meredith Doig	In favour
1417 Dinusha Thanippuli Arachchige	Meredith Doig	In favour
1424 Brett Connolly	Meredith Doig	No direction
1424 Jacqui Connolly	Meredith Doig	No direction
1436 Candy Broad	Meredith Doig	In favour

1.4. Quorum

Under current Rules, quorum is achieved by at least 10 members in attendance. The following twelve financial Members being in attendance, a quorum was declared and the AGM was officially declared open at 20:05.

18 Rohan Kapitany (via Skype)	411 Lyn Allison
159 Diane Preston	545 Leonard Buller
191 John Perkins	677 Richard Perera
218 Ken Wright	781 Tania Rook
220 Lesley Vick	892 Chris Fotinopoulos
220 Ken Davidson	1181 Rod Bower
390 Meredith Doig	1296 Jonathan Meddings

2. Minutes of the previous AGM

Minutes of the 2012 AGM had been previously circulated with the Notice of the 2013 AGM. Recommended that the 2012 Minutes be accepted as a true and correct record:

Moved: Lesley Vick
Seconded: Diane Preston
Carried.

3. Business arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the 2012 AGM minutes.

4. Reports

4.1. President's report

The main highlight of FY2013 was the very successful Sean Faircloth Tour in March and April. This not only raised the profile of secular issues through Sean's powerful presentations in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth and extensive media coverage, but also showed that freethought groups can collaborate effectively to produce sound policy and mount successful events.

Further contributing to the RSA's mission to educate the public about the benefits of a rationalist approach to life, Members will be pleased to note the resurrection of the RSA's flagship journal the *Australian Rationalist* under the editorship of professional journalist David James. The journal is distributed throughout Australia to selected newsagencies.

From an administration point of view, for the first time the RSA Committee extended beyond Victoria, with Committee members in Sydney and Brisbane, thanks to the communications power of new technology.

The Investment Committee has managed the RSA's asset portfolio prudently, following a conservative investment policy.

Campaigns

Education about Religions and Beliefs

The RSA has participated actively in consultations with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) regarding education about religions and beliefs in the national curriculum. Despite pressure from some religionists, ACARA has rejected the option of developing a separate subject, instead choosing to incorporate ideas about religions and beliefs in existing subjects, particularly Civics and Citizenship.

In Victoria, we continue to work with FIRIS (Fairness in Religion in Schools) and Liberty Victoria to ameliorate the impact of ACCESS Ministries' evangelical push into government schools.

10 Point Plan for a Secular Australia

This year has seen growth of our collaborative efforts with other freethought organisations. In the lead up to the Sean Faircloth tour, we worked with the Victorian Humanists, the Progressive Atheists, the Freethought Student Alliance and the Victorian Skeptics to produce a *10 Point Plan for a Secular Australia*. This succinctly summarises ten public policy goals of the freethought movement, from removing laws that entrench religious privilege to protecting children from the harmful effects of religious superstition and bigotry.

Secular Scorecard

In the lead up to September's Federal election, we conducted our first ever Secular Scorecard, reviewing the political platforms of 10 parties against the *10 Point Plan for a Secular Australia*. Unsurprisingly the Secular Party of Australia, the Greens and the Sex Party scored straight As, while Labor got a B and the Liberals a C.

Census

In consultation with a number of other freethought groups, the RSA put in a submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the "Religion" question for the next census. This is a long running issue that should gain momentum as the number of people positively identifying as non-religious continues to increase.

Events

Sean Faircloth Tour

The main event was the very successful Australian and New Zealand tour of Sean Faircloth, Director of Strategy and Policy at the Richard Dawkins Foundation in the US.

During a hectic week just before Easter, we had Sean at the Sydney Opera House sharing the stage with AC Grayling, Father Frank Brennan SJ AO and Pru Goward MP to an audience of about 1,000. The Opera House's Program Manager called him "a real firecracker" and said they'd love to have him back.

In Melbourne, Sean spoke to full houses at Melbourne University, the Kyneton Mechanics Institute in Central Victoria, and the Wheeler Centre for Books and Ideas. In Perth, there was a packed theatre at University of Western Australia and a book launch which sold out.

In addition to these on stage events, we organised media coverage with *Planet America* and *Life Matters* in Sydney, Triple J youth radio, 3RRR community radio, Jon Faine's *Conversation Hour*, Central Victorian ABC radio and local radio in Perth.

After Easter, Sean headed to New Zealand, where our colleagues the NZ Rationalists and Humanists organised another hectic week of appearances in Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington.

Not only did Sean's tour inspire the *10 Point Plan for a Secular Australia* but also the development of strong collaborative relations with a range of other freethought groups across Australia and New Zealand.

After returning to the US, Sean wrote that his Australian and NZ tour was the best he'd ever experienced.

Communications

Journal

Under new Editor David James, Winter (June) and Spring (September) editions of the new *Australian Rationalist* have been produced, featuring lead articles of current interest as well as regular sections on Philosophy, Law & Politics, Ethics & Religion, Science & Technology. Former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser featured in the Spring edition, and former Australian diplomat Bruce Haigh in the Winter edition.

RSA Daily

In addition to the quarterly hard copy journal, this year we introduced *RSADaily*, an online daily digest of articles of interest from Australia and around the world. From small beginnings, *RSADaily* is growing strongly and now has over 125 subscribers.

Website

During the year we migrated our website to a new Wordpress platform, which is not only cleaner to the eye but easier to administer.

Occasional emails

Using Mailchimp, we have sent out nine occasional emails to Members, ranging from follow ups to the Sean Faircloth tour to time-critical items of interest.

Legal Matters

Change of legislation

In Victoria the legislation governing associations was updated and this meant we had to review and update the Rules of the RSA. Workshops provided by the Public Interest Legal Clearing House (PILCH) were very helpful in understanding what to do and how to do it.

Charity status

The RSA was formally incorporated in October 2011. Following satisfactory settlement of the dispute within the board of the Rationalist Association (RAA) in December 2011, the RAA's assets have been progressively transferred to the RSA. Under the guidance of the newly established RSA Investment Committee, these assets have been invested prudently using a conservative investment philosophy. During 2013, with the assistance of accounting and tax firm Hayes Knight, the RSA's status as a charity was confirmed by the ACNC and the ATO subsequently confirmed the RSA is income tax exempt. Hayes Knight has been appointed the RSA's tax agent.

Expulsion of a Member

David McKenzie was a long term member of the RSA, serving as Vice President for many years. He was also Company Secretary and Investment Manager for the RAA from 1990. During this time, the RAA lost about 75% of the value of its portfolio due to an 'active' investment policy. When challenged, Mr McKenzie resisted reasonable requests to change to a 'passive' investment policy, instead attempting to shore up his control of the RAA. This led to a major dispute within the board of the RAA, which was settled in December 2011. During the year, the RSA Committee determined that Mr McKenzie's actions had been unbecoming as a member of the RSA and prejudicial to the interests of the RSA. Following due process, the RSA Committee expelled him as a member of the RSA.

RSA Management

The RSA Committee met 12 times during the year. Jason Ball retired and Jonathan Meddings was co-opted in his place. We practised using skype to conduct our meetings, with Anthony Englund in Sydney and Peter Ellerton in Brisbane, and this proved eminently workable.

Investment Committee

During the year, the Investment Committee continued to pursue a 'passive investment' philosophy, with a target of 80% of assets in cash or cash equivalents and 20% in blue chip shares. This asset allocation model is reviewed on a quarterly basis.

Personal: Visit to Uganda's Kasese Humanist School

Some years ago the RSA was contacted by a fellow freethinker from Uganda, Bwambale Robert. In a country where over 80% of the population is evangelical Christian, he was interested in establishing a freethought library. We sent him a box of RSA books and journals.

A year later we heard that Bwambale had set up a primary school, the Kasese Humanist School, with the explicit aim of teaching 'lessons free from dogmas and indoctrinations prevalent in the majority of Ugandan communities'.

I had the great pleasure and privilege of visiting the Kasese Humanist School during my trip to Africa in September 2013. Bwambale introduced us to the Headmaster of the school, Mr David, and his 14 teachers. I gave an impromptu lesson to a class of students, who asked questions like "Why are koalas only in Australia?" Hmmm!

We also had a tour of the facilities, including the library (where we saw RSA journals on the shelves) and the chook-house ("The eggs are an important source of protein for the students' brains!")

Next year Bwambale and his Headmaster are looking forward to building a permanent school on land they have purchased not far from their current location on rented railway land. They need just \$30,000 to do this and I would urge all Members to contribute to this very worthy project. Donations are overseen by the Atheist Alliance International. Please check out the Kasese Humanist School at www.kasesehumanistschool.webs.com and give generously.

There was a question from the floor about the location of Kasese. Meredith explained that Kasese is about 300 km west of Kampala, the capital of Uganda. With a population between 1 and 2 million, it was formerly a railway hub in colonial times but most of the railways have since fallen into disuse.

Moved that the President's report be received: John Perkins

Seconded: Lyn Allison

Carried.

4.2. Secretary's report

FY12 saw the advent of a process for contacting members regarding renewal. In the FY13 year, this process was tightened up further, meaning we now have a good system for keeping on top of memberships.

Results-wise, FY13 saw a drop in overall membership of 17% from the year before. However, this was caused by the deleting of records relating to lapsed members who were given three opportunities to renew. The number of lapsed members at the end of FY13 was 191% lower than it was at the beginning. The number of paying members actually increased by 9% in the FY13, and this was all in the area of renewals.

This was predominantly driven by the newsletter, and I would like to acknowledge the great work done by all the committee in preparing the four newsletters that went out in the FY13 year. I used these as triggers to contact lapsed members, which also saved on postage in terms of killing two birds with one stone. As an interim measure between journals, I feel the newsletters as put together by the different members of the committee were a great contribution to the lexicon of RSA literature.

There was a question from the floor about the RSA's actual membership? Tania explained that it is currently about 480.

Moved that the Secretary's report be received: Leonard Buller

Seconded: Chris Fotinopoulos

Carried.

4.3. Treasurer's report

The Treasurer presented the Financial Statements for Financial Year 2012-2013, attached.

Balance Sheet

Net assets totalling \$738,507.

The Rationalist Association of Australia has transferred all its remaining assets to our Society and their total value at the time of transfer was \$602,211. We have also received a bequest of \$125,000 from Mr J. R. Howard. These two items represent the bulk of the Society's wealth.

Most of the RAA's investments were sold by RAA and the proceeds paid to the RSA in cash. There were two exceptions to this: we accepted 161,379 shares in Tanami Gold NL, a company listed on the stock exchange, and 20,000 shares in Silver City Mining Co. Ltd, an unlisted company. The Tanami shares were trading at \$0.73 when we received them, and we were able to sell them progressively, mostly at more than \$0.73, resulting in a gain of \$12,368 (as reported on the Income and Expenditure statement). As the Silver

City shares are unlisted, there was no published price for them, so we valued them conservatively at \$0.50 each, hoping to sell them for more than that amount. However, there is very little demand for these shares and as at the end of FY13, they remain unsold.

Under our conservative investment strategy, most of our money is held in bank accounts or term deposits. We did, however, invest \$20,000 in each of three major banks, and those holdings have appreciated by about 30%.

Income and Expenditure Statement

Satisfactory surplus of \$9,801 for the FY13 financial year.

The Faircloth tour of Australia yielded \$7,792 in revenue against costs of \$4,918, a net gain of \$2,874.

For the FY13 year, there were two large items of expense that are non-recurring. These were \$3,850 in accounting costs to have the Society set up as a corporation and to receive tax exempt charity status. There were also administrative costs of \$6,363 relating to the dispute with the RAA, which is now settled.

The only large recurring item is the President's honorarium, at the rate of \$10,000 a year, which has been approved by the Committee in recognition of the very substantial amount of time devoted by Meredith Doig to the RSA.

The Chair asked that Members particularly note the regular donation we have been receiving for a number of years now from Member Chris Burkill. While not a large amount, it is very gratifying to receive donations on a regular basis. When the President contacted Mr Burkill to offer the RSA's thanks, he said he was not ordinarily an activist but wanted to actively support the RSA's actions. The meeting concurred with the President's expression of appreciation.

Moved that the Treasurer's report be received: Ken Wright.

Seconded Ken Davidson.

Carried.

5. Previously circulated motions

That the Rules of the Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. attached to the Notice of 2013 Annual General Meeting are adopted.

The Chair explained that during the year, the legislation governing associations in Victoria was updated. Significant changes include:

1. Associations used to have a "Public Officer" who was responsible for compliance with the Act and any other requirements of the Victorian Registrar (in the Department of Consumer Affairs). This role is now to be called "Secretary". This aligns with the role of "Corporate Secretary" in the Commonwealth Corporations Act.
2. There is no longer any prohibition on trading for associations.
3. If they have a good reason, Members can ask the Secretary to suppress their personal information on the Members register. This means their name and contact details would not be shown to other Members (who have the right to inspect the Members register).
4. Meetings of Members and of the Committee can now be held using technology.

She further explained that the RSA’s existing Rules were based on the “Model Rules” under the old Act, with some minor deviations. The proposed RSA Rules are similarly based on the new Model Rules, with similar deviations. The deviations are:

Model Rules	Proposed RSA Rules	Why?
Members can decide a lower annual subscription fee for associate members.	Members can decide a <i>different</i> annual fee for associate members <i>or other classes of members</i> .	To accommodate the RSA’s four classes of members: single, couple, single concession and couple concession.
The Committee consists of a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and ordinary members.	The Committee <i>consists of 7-9 members</i> and consists of <i>the offices of</i> President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and ordinary members.	To be consistent with the RSA’s existing Rules, which specify a Committee of 7 with the possibility of co-opting a further 2. Also see next Rule.
At the AGM, separate elections are held for President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The AGM decides the number of ordinary members of the Committee for the following year.	Prior to the AGM, the Committee decides the size of the Committee for the following year (ie, 7 or 8 or 9). A single election is held for all Committee positions.	To be consistent with the RSA’s existing Rules, which specify that Members elect the Committee, and the Committee decides who will be President etc at their first meeting.
	No committee member is eligible to be President etc unless they have been a financial member for at least a year and a day.	Consistent with existing RSA Rules. Intended as a protective mechanism.

There were no questions from the floor.

Having explained that this is a Special Resolution that requires a 75% majority, the Chair moved the motion.

Seconded: John Perkins

Carried unanimously.

6. Election of a Committee

Nominations for the Committee were received from the following Members:

1. Lyn Allison
2. Meredith Doig
3. Peter Ellerton
4. Anthony Englund
5. Rohan Kapitany
6. Jonathon Meddings
7. Diane Preston.

There being no other nominations, the Chair declared these Members duly elected to the RSA Committee of Management until the next AGM.

The Chair explained that three Members have retired from the Committee. Rod Bower expressed a wish to concentrate his time and efforts to help build the new Secular Coalition of Australia (SECOA); Tania Rook will continue membership-related work she has been doing but as “Admin Officer” supporting the Committee rather than as a formal member; and similarly, Ken Wright will continue doing the book-keeping work he has been doing, but not as a formal member of the Committee.

7. Any other business

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.

8. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 20:51.

Tania Rook

Secretary

Date: 22.11.2013