



RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REPORT
2019

TEN POINT PLAN FOR A SECULAR AUSTRALIA

1. *A secular, pluralistic and democratic Australia*
2. *Clear separation between religion and the State*
3. *'One law for all', with no recognition of parallel legal systems*
4. *Religious organisations subject to the same laws as other organisations*
5. *Children not to suffer because of the religious views of their parents*
6. *Education to be strictly secular, not promoting any particular religion*
7. *No discrimination on the basis of a person's sex, sexuality or gender identity*
8. *Freedom of reproductive choice, with no religious interference*
9. *Healthcare available to all regardless of the religious views of the provider*
10. *Guaranteed control over one's own body, free from religious interference, when facing end of life.*



RSA PATRONS AND FELLOWS

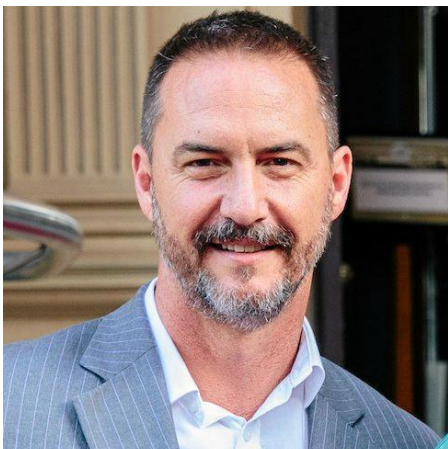


The RSA was delighted during the year that Professor Fiona Stanley AC FAA accepted our invitation to become the RSA's fourth Patron, joining the Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG, the Hon. Gareth Evans AC QC and Dr Rodney Syme AM.

Born in Sydney but spending most of her career as an epidemiologist in Perth, Fiona Stanley was Australian of the Year in 2003. She is a passionate advocate for science, and for an 'open society' that includes a strong, independent media. In accepting our invitation she

commented, "I have looked at the RSA website and am impressed ... particularly with the RSA's vision of trusting science and evidence rather than superstition and anecdote – we certainly need a good dose of science now in the face of we scientists being swept aside!"

During the year, we added former RSA board member and critical thinking expert Dr Peter Ellerton of the University of Queensland to our stable of RSA Fellows, joining public intellectual Dr Paul Monk and constitutional lawyer Dr Luke Beck as our subject matter experts.



With the shock election of the Morrison government in May 2019, Australia has its first openly Pentacostalist prime minister. As we are now seeing, religionist vested interests are using the opportunity to entangle religion with government policy as never before.

ABOUT THE RSA



"I suspect all Rationalists are Stoics,
and Stoics share the Three Pillars of
Rationalism."

Meredith Doig

Biologist-turned-philosopher Massimo Pigliucci has done more than most to popularise "New Stoicism", a modern interpretation of the ancient Graeco-Roman philosophy.

He summarises three foundational ideas of Stoicism: to work out how to live your life (*ethics*), you need to study *physics* (understanding the real world using the senses) and *logic* (understanding how the mind works - what we would call today cognitive science).

This sounds suspiciously like the Three Pillars of Rationalism:

-- Rationalists believe in *naturalism* - that the natural world is the only world there is and thus there is therefore no afterlife and no forelife, no heaven and no hell

-- Rationalists are *humanists* - which means the meaning and purpose in life is created by humans, not received from the gods or God, or some sacred text

-- Rationalists are committed to *rationality* - in their beliefs and their behaviour. In forming beliefs, a Rationalist relies on empirical evidence, logic and thoughtful reflection, not on unquestioning obedience to authority, blind faith or guesswork.

Rationalism is *not* the same as 'economic rationalism', an economic theory that focuses purely on monetary worth as a measure of value, without taking into account social and moral considerations - something most Rationalists would not see as rational at all.

Nor is modern Rationalism the same thing as 'rationalism' in the history of philosophy. Rationalist philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz held that the world could be understood by just *thinking* about it, in contrast with the empiricists. Few modern Rationalists would be rationalists in this sense.

For more on what it means to be a Rationalist. see "About/Rationalism" on our website.

CAMPAIGNS



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Last year we put in a major submission to the Ruddock Inquiry on Religious Freedom and had a private meeting with the panel. Despite widespread and well-founded suspicions about the panel's role, their eventual report was reasonably balanced, finding that there was no threat to religious freedom in this country. The Morrison government stalled its response to the report, no doubt because it failed to deliver what the more extremist elements in the party room wanted.

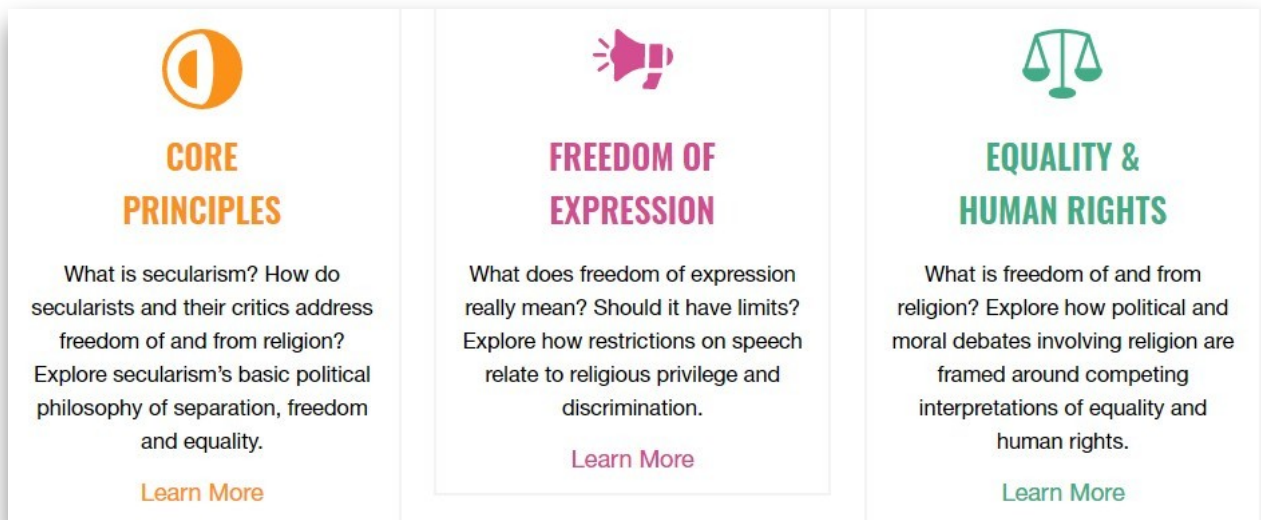
After months of delay, in August 2019 Attorney-General Christian Porter finally released a bill ostensibly designed to protect against discrimination on the grounds of religion.

The RSA is not necessarily opposed to including religion as a ground in anti-discrimination laws. Most states and territories already have such laws, and the federal government is obliged, as a

signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to protect against discrimination on the ground of religion *or belief*. However, the draft RD bill goes much further than providing such a shield; it equips religious bodies and religionists with a positive *sword* to shut down anyone who dares challenge their views or privileges.

In October, the RSA put in a submission on this flawed bill, arguing that the bill should be restricted to mirroring the provisions of other federal anti-discrimination laws, deleting the unprecedented additional clauses that have clearly been included in response to lobbying by powerful religious forces (eg, the 'Folau' clause on employer codes of conduct and the 'Porteous' clause overriding Tasmanian anti-discrimination law).

CAMPAIGNS



RATIONALIST CURRICULUM

Last year we decided to keep a watching brief on the Victorian Government's decision to roll out a new 'Worldviews' curriculum, which would include education about secular humanism and rationalism. We met during the year with the new officer at the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority in charge of progressing this project, yet there is still little progress.

Education is clearly an important mechanism for countering the pernicious infiltration of religious ideology in schools, so we approached the Victorian Humanists with the idea of collaborating on a curriculum development project ourselves.

A joint steering committee has been formed and a well-credentialed consultant identified to do the work. This will be a significant project over the next 12 months.

PRAYERS BEFORE PARLIAMENT

Early in 2019, RSA made a significant financial contribution to support a Monash University project, led by RSA Fellow Associate Professor Luke Beck, examining the constitutional legality of religious prayers recited before local council meetings.

The resulting research will provide a scholarly basis for later campaigns to challenge the practice of prayers before parliament.

CAMPAIGNS

"To be a Stoic, it ultimately does not matter if we think the Logos is God or Nature, as long as we recognize that a decent human life is about the cultivation of one's character and concern for other people and is best enjoyed by way of a proper – but not fanatical – detachment from mere worldly goods."

Massimo Pigliucci



CHAPLAINCY CHALLENGE

In January 2019, we sent out a major survey to all Victorian school principals, seeking their views on the National School Chaplaincy Program that could be used as contributory evidence in our VCAT challenge to this overtly discriminatory program.

Acting as our legal advocate, RSA Fellow Luke Beck successfully negotiated with the Victorian Education Department such that they agreed to amend their public documentation to acknowledge that chaplains “may be of any faith **or no faith**” and that chaplains who do not have a religious affiliation can still meet the requirements of the National School Chaplaincy Program if they are simply endorsed by a religious organisation.

While these clarifications are welcome, the

government is so far failing to enforce these newly-documented policies. Chaplaincy providers such as Scripture Union Victoria and Korus Connect (formerly ACCESS Ministries) continue to state they will not even consider hiring non-Christians, despite the new government policy.

RSA will continue to pursue this matter.

OUTREACH



MEETINGS

We have continued to hold monthly public Meetups on topics ranging from the pros and cons of My Health Record, to 'Islam & the Future of Tolerance', to the role of Reason in a fractious society.

These meetings were set up some five years ago by RSA Treasurer Len Buller, who was keen to see a forum where members and friends could practise critical thinking in conversation. In April 2019 we were much saddened to learn that Len died of complications arising from a golden staph infection. His wry humour and good business sense are sorely missed. RSA member Rosemary Watson has kindly agreed to continue organising the RSA Meetups.

IN PRINT

We continue to publish our flagship quarterly journal, the *Australian Rationalist*, under the editorship of professional journalist David James. The last year featured cover stories on *Why is there something rather than nothing*; *How the Enlightenment changed everything*; *Political correctness*; and the *Open Society*.

In addition, this year we published an Occasional Paper on *Religion & Society*, written by RSA Fellow Paul Monk. A copy of this timely paper was sent to all members of the federal government. We also commissioned papers on *Identity Politics* from Melbourne University philosopher Dan Halliday and film and media editor Adolfo Aranjuez, which will feature in the December 2019 journal.



Vale Len Buller

OUTREACH



SOCIAL MEDIA



The RSA maintains a reasonably active presence on Facebook and Twitter, with our Facebook followers up 230% (from 3,500 to 8,000) and 'Twitter impressions' (tweets that actually generate interaction by others online) about doubled (from 6,000 to 11,000).

Our bulletin *RSA Daily* continues to attract subscribers, up 26% (from 556 to 703) from this time last year. The RSA website was refreshed during the year, thanks to *Fair Digital*.

GOVERNANCE

The RSA Board meets monthly during the year, with the Financial Advisory Committee and the Editorial Committee meeting on a quarterly basis. Vice-president Hugh Harris has decided to take a break from the board due to the pressure of family and job commitments and Edmund

Munday withdrew during the year due to pressure of work. We thank them both for their contributions.

This year we engaged Chris Noonan as our Administration Officer for two days a week to manage memberships and regular financials. Chris has also built our use of Action Network, a platform that supports grassroots campaigning, from letter campaigns to politicians to fundraising.

The Society's funds continue to be governed by a Financial Advisory Committee, comprising the president, the treasurer, the RSA's *pro bono* accountant, and a professionally qualified independent expert, reporting to the board. The board continues to follow a prudent 'passive' investment policy.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. For the year ended 30 June 2019

	2019	2018
Income		
Income		
Investment Income	32,020	57,764
Member Revenue		
Member Donations	3,852	192,209
Membership Fees	21,313	21,705
Total Member Revenue	25,165	213,914
Revenue from Operating Activities		
Event Revenue	-	1,030
Journal Subscriptions & Sales	1,660	2,921
Total Revenue from Operating Activities	1,660	3,951
Other Operating Income		
Gain on sale of investments	-	12,387
Royalties	1,047	1,915
Total Other Operating Income	1,047	14,302
Total Income	59,892	289,931
Total Income	59,892	289,931
Gross Surplus	59,892	289,931
Expenditure		
Campaign Expenses		
Campaign expenses	318	-
Commissioned Reports	-	1,100
Minor Collaborations	-	255
Total Campaign Expenses	318	1,355
Employment Costs		
Superannuation	-	5,102
Wages and Salaries	-	55,109
Total Employment Costs	-	60,211
Finance Expenses		
Bank Fees	292	-
Finance Charges	208	371
Total Finance Expenses	500	371
Journal Production Costs		
Authors and Contributions	8,338	2,250
Editors Fees	16,575	16,600
Journal Design Fees	6,975	3,675
Journal Posting and Mailing	6,134	6,611

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements. These statements should be read in conjunction with the attached compilation report.

	2019	2018
Printing Journal	15,481	15,153
Total Journal Production Costs	53,503	44,289
Marketing		
Marketing	8,564	326
Total Marketing	8,564	326
Office Expenses		
Accounting Software	-	600
Admin Officer's Fee	6,000	-
Insurance	33	1,143
Meeting Expenses	322	529
Office Expenses	1,067	675
Postage	375	1,210
Printing & Stationery	60	37
Rent	-	2,290
Staff training	-	2,257
Subscriptions	72	-
Telephone & Internet	95	250
Total Office Expenses	8,024	8,991
Research Project		
Monash Uni research	22,998	-
Total Research Project	22,998	-
Website Expenditure		
Web Hosting & Maintenance	270	340
Website Development	4,000	-
Total Website Expenditure	4,270	340
Total Expenditure	98,177	115,883
Current Year Surplus/ (Deficit) Before Income Tax Adjustments	(38,284)	174,047
Current Year Surplus/(Deficit) Before Income Tax	(38,284)	174,047
Net Current Year Surplus After Income Tax	(38,284)	174,047

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES STATEMENT

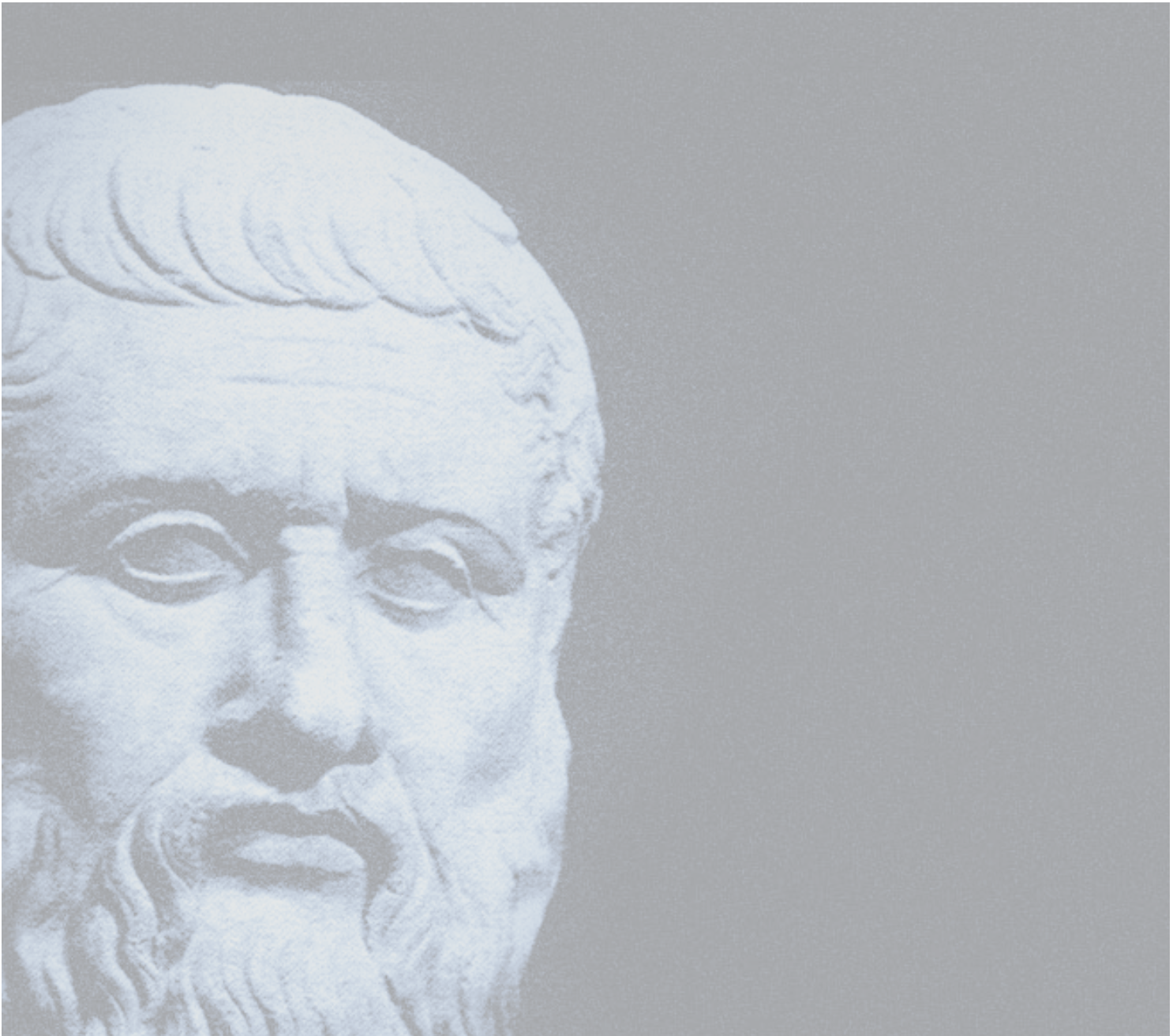
Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. As at 30 June 2019

	NOTES	30 JUN 2019	30 JUN 2018
Assets			
Current Assets			
Cash and Cash Equivalents			
Cash at Bank		12,416	47,514
PayPal		664	900
Total Cash and Cash Equivalents		13,079	48,414
Other Current Assets			
Distributions Receivable		12,045	28,853
Franking Credits Receivable		8,742	4,740
Total Other Current Assets		20,787	33,594
Total Current Assets		33,866	82,008
Non-Current Assets			
Other Non-Current Assets			
Direct Share Investments			
NAB Shares - DRP - 35 Shares		935	-
Total Direct Share Investments		935	-
Managed Funds		892,427	854,508
Total Other Non-Current Assets		893,362	854,508
Total Non-Current Assets		893,362	854,508
Total Assets		927,229	936,516
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities			
Employee Entitlements		-	5,406
Total Current Liabilities		-	5,406
Total Liabilities		-	5,406
Net Assets		927,229	931,110
Member's Funds			
Capital Reserve			
Asset Revaluation Reserve		94,853	60,451
Current Year Earnings		(38,284)	174,047
Equity		870,659	696,612
Total Capital Reserve		927,229	931,110
Total Member's Funds		927,229	931,110

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements. These statements should be read in conjunction with the attached

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