

PATRONS

Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG
Prof. the Hon. Gareth Evans AC QC
Dr Rodney Syme AM
Prof. Fiona Stanley AC



**RATIONALIST
SOCIETY OF
AUSTRALIA**

Rationalist Society of Australia Inc. 2019 Annual General Meeting Minutes

DATE: Thursday 10 October 2019
TIME: Dinner at 6.30pm; AGM from 7.30pm
VENUE: Upstairs at the Tivoli Club
291 Dandenong Rd, Windsor VIC 3181

This year's Guest Speaker was Haans Siver, long term campaigner with the Sea Shepherd. Following her inspiring talk, the formal Annual General Meeting began at 7.45pm.

Business of the Meeting

1. Formal matters

a. Election of a chair

Meredith Doig was elected as chair of the meeting.

Moved: Ian Robinson (*Life member*) Seconded: Lara Kaput

b. Attendees and Apologies

In attendance:

Members:

1. Christopher Noonan
2. Mathew Withoos
3. Luke Beck
4. Nick Less
5. George Leighfield
6. David Stimson
7. Robert Van De Graaff

8. Robert Traill
9. Les Fitzgerald
10. Leslie Allan
11. Lara Kaput
12. Gaik Igithkhanian
13. Ralph Catts
14. Leo Brewin
15. Ian Robinson (*Life Member*)

Observers:

1. David Kennedy
2. Carmel McNaught (*Honorary Member*)
3. Brett Davis (*Honorary Member*)

Apart from those who sent in proxies, the following apologies have been received:
Lesley Vick, Ken Davidson.

c. Proxies

Fifty-eight Members assigned their vote to a proxy, as listed below:

Name	Proxy	Name	Proxy	Name	Proxy
1. Rex Williams	Meredith Doig	21. Christopher Hall	Chair	41. Dominic Kelly	Meredith Doig
2. Lesley Vick	Chair	22. Peter Burnheim	Chair	42. Joel Murray	Chair
3. Ken Davidson	Chair	23. Kevin McDonald	Meredith Doig	43. Rud Crawford	Chair
4. Peter Consandine	Meredith Doig	24. Margaret Gawler	Chair	44. Des Jardins	Chair
5. Michael Henry	Meredith Doig	25. Hugh Sarjeant	Meredith Doig	45. Con Karavas	Meredith Doig
6. Derek O'Reilly	Chair	26. Ken Derrick	Chair	46. David Swanton	Chair
7. Craig Sankey	Chair	27. Peter Ostarek-Gamm on	Chair	47. Stella Thomas	Meredith Doig
8. Gregory Norton	Meredith Doig	28. Regina Hoepfner	Chair	48. Trevor Lee	Meredith Doig
9. Jenny Stonier	Chair	29. Julian Jordan	Chair	49. Glyn Cryer	Meredith Doig
10. David Freeman	Meredith Doig	30. Tony Krins	Chair	50. Steve Shinnars	Meredith Doig
11. William Darvall	Meredith Doig	31. Marcia Manning	Meredith Doig	51. Behn Payten	Meredith Doig

12. Roger Fedyk	Chair	32. Jon Cook	Chair	52. Colin Harwood	Chair
13. David Olkowski	Chair	33. Meg Middleton	Chair	53. Stuart Rawlinson	Chair
14. Mark Fyfe	Chair	34. Rohan Navaratne	Chair	54. Graziano Birgi	Chair
15. Ross Entwistle	Chair	35. Norman Heath	Meredith Doig	55. Jacquie Connolly	Meredith Doig
16. Phillip Sweeney	Meredith Doig	36. Jack Dikian	Chair	56. Brett Connolly	Meredith Doig
17. Nigel Sinnott	Chair	37. Dierk von Behrens	Chair	57. Mark Taylor	Chair
18. David Higginbottom	Chair	38. Valerie Bourke	Chair	58. John Barrell	Meredith Doig
19. Adrian Gargett	Chair	39. Barry Clearwater	Chair		
20. Brian Salter-Duke	Chair	40. David Slatyer	Chair		

d. Quorum

The RSA Rules specify that a quorum comprises the lesser of 10% of the members entitled to vote, or 40 members entitled to vote. There being 15 Members present and 58 proxies, a quorum was achieved.

2. Minutes of the last AGM

Motion 2.1: It was moved and carried without dissent that the Minutes of the 2018 AGM be accepted as a true record.

Moved: David Stimson

Seconded: Robert Van De Graaff

There is no formal business arising from the Minutes of the last AGM.

3. Reports

a. President's report

Motion 3.1: It was moved and carried without dissent that the President's report be noted.

Moved: Les Allen

Seconded: Luke Beck

b. Treasurer's report

Motion 3.2: It was moved and carried without dissent that the Treasurer's report be adopted.

Moved: Ian Robinson

Seconded: David Stimson

4. Election of a Committee

The RSA Rules specify that a committee of at least five but not more than seven Members be elected.

Motion 4.1: There being six nominations received, it was moved and carried without dissent that a committee of six be elected, comprising: Meredith Doig, Luke Beck, Nick Lee, Leo Brewin, Matt Withoos and Christopher Noonan.

Moved: Meredith Doig Seconded: Brett Davis

5. General business

Nil.

6. Next meeting

The next AGM will be held between 1 July and 30 November 2020. The Committee of Management will decide the actual date and notify members at least 21 days prior.

President's report

Introduction

The RSA was delighted during the year that Professor Fiona Stanley AC FAA accepted our invitation to become the RSA's fourth Patron. 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 Peter Ellerton of the University of Queensland to our stable of RSA Fellows, joining public intellectual Paul Monk and constitutional lawyer Luke Beck as our subject matter experts.

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

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 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 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, but 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).

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, but there seems to be 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 the 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.

Chaplaincy Challenge

In January we sent out a major survey to all Victorian school principals, seeking their views on the Chaplaincy Program that could be used as contributory evidence in our VCAT challenge. Acting as our legal advocate, RSA Fellow Luke Beck managed to have the Victorian Education Department agree 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 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.

Prayers before Parliament

Early in 2019, RSA made a significant 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.

Outreach

Public 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.

Print publications

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 the 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.

Electronic publications

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). The RSA website was refreshed during the year, thanks to Fair Digital.

Governance and management

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.

Financials

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.



Dr Meredith Doig, President