



# Annual Report: 2024/25



RATIONALIST  
SOCIETY OF  
AUSTRALIA

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### Acknowledgement of Country

The Rationalist Society of Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to lands, sea and communities.

## A message from the President



When Meredith Doig OAM retired as RSA President last year after almost 20 years as a director – and 13 as President – it was a daunting prospect to be nominated to follow in her footsteps. But it's also been a real honour to contribute to the work of Australia's oldest freethought organisation.

The 2024/25 year was a productive one for the RSA, with active campaigning across our priority areas. Much of this work was shared with members through RSA's communication channels, often reaching a wider audience through the traditional media, as well.

A major focus was our advocacy on secularism. And I'm pleased to say we had some wins and made progress on a number of issues (see pages 8-9). Such achievements highlight the power of community-led advocacy and the vital role organisations like the RSA play in

driving change. The RSA continued to collaborate with like-minded groups through the Secularism Australia Forum and other networks, helping to share resources and strengthen our campaign impact.

Operationally, the RSA was able to expand our professional team by appointing a part-time Administrator, aided by a generous donation from Meredith.

As noted in the finance report, the long-term financial outlook is not yet secure. The Board has been exploring options to ensure future sustainability. This work will remain a priority in the coming year.

On a personal note, after four years on the Board, I have chosen not to renominate. I'll remain a member, of course, and will be watching the RSA's progress with interest, knowing that the organisation is in capable hands. In parting, I want to thank my fellow directors for their support and contributions. A special thanks to retiring directors Arash Rashidian and Stella Thomas for their many years of service, and to Executive Director, Si Gladman, whose passion and productivity is second to none.

Finally, I acknowledge the many members who freely give their time and expertise to support the RSA's operations and strategic projects. Thank you.

**Vicki Caulfield,**  
President



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# A message from the Executive Director



It was a privilege to continue leading the RSA's daily operations and advocacy work in 2024/25. We again provided Australia's strongest voice for reason, secularism, and evidence-based policy in the public domain.

Most of our work focused on advocating for secular reform and the rights of non-religious and ex-religious people. We've collaborated with many exceptional secular advocates and people who are issue-area experts.

We actively engaged with government leaders, elected representatives and government departments and agencies at all levels of government. We drew responses, explanations, and commitments from the highest offices on a wide range of issues that we care about.

This work is so important. Our country's

demographics may be rapidly changing, with people increasingly identifying as not religious. Yet, political actors, government institutions and programs continue to privilege religion and the voices of religious leaders.

Religious privilege was central to so many of the issues that we worked on in 2024/25 – from prayers in parliaments and government institutions, to religious dominance of national commemorations, the funding of chaplains in public schools, the intrusion of scripture classes in schools, our Defence force's reliance on religious chaplaincy as its frontline wellbeing model, the influence of faith advisory bodies, the tax and other exemptions for faith-based charities, religious exemptions to discrimination laws ... and the list goes on! Indeed, we only scratched the surface.

It's clear to me that Australia needs to see a wave of broad secular reform. Yet, without a strong voice for secularism, there's no guarantee that will happen.

I am interested in the idea of professionalising the pro-secular movement in Australia so that we can realise the vision of a truly secular Australia. Given the RSA's leadership in this space, I think there's an opportunity for us to explore.

**Si Gladman,  
Executive Director**

# Who we are

The Rationalist Society of Australia is the oldest freethought group in Australia, promoting reason since 1906. Our members and supporters hold that:

- All significant beliefs and actions should be based on reason and evidence.
- The natural world is the only world there is.
- Answers to the key questions of human existence are to be found only in that natural world.

We aim to:

- Propound and advance rationalism.
- Stimulate freedom of thought.
- Promote inquiry into religious and other superstitious beliefs and practices.
- Encourage interest in science, criticism and philosophy, as connected factors in a progressive human culture, independent of theological creeds and dogmas.
- Promote the fullest possible use of science for human welfare.
- Promote a secular and ethical system of education.

# Our team

In the first half of 2025, we welcomed Tanya Marwood as Administrator. Tanya has a history of working with community organisations in Western Australia. The board is ably supported by Brett Davis (Accountant) and Melanie Fanor (Bookkeeper).

# Our board

Our board members are dedicated volunteers who bring skills and experience from careers in various fields.



**Vicki Caulfield (President)**  
Vicki has a career of working in government and not-for-profit sectors. She is a long-time advocate of secularism.



**Luke Beck (Vice-President)**  
Luke is a constitutional law scholar in the field of separation of religion and government, and religious freedom.



**Stella Thomas (Treasurer)**  
Stella has a background in business management and administration. She is a long-time advocate of secularism.



**Si Gladman (Secretary, Executive Director)**  
Si has a background in journalism and communications. He has been a secular advocate for more than five years.



**Arash Rashidian**  
Arash is a business advisor with 30 years of experience in various facets of business and engineering consulting.



**Collin Acton**  
Collin is the former Principal Chaplain and Director-General of Chaplaincy in the Royal Australian Navy.



**Victor Franco**  
Victor is the Deputy Mayor and a councillor at the City of Boroondara in Victoria. Victor has a long career in local and federal government.

# Our advocacy work

In 2024/25, our advocacy work focused largely on seeking secular reforms in the following broad campaign areas and narrow policy issues:

## Secular education

- chaplaincy in schools
- religious instruction / scripture programs in government schools

## Secular government

- Census religion question
- prayers in government
- charities, tax and religion
- chaplaincy in the military, and religion in military commemorations
- other matters of separation of church and state

## Human rights

- religious exemptions to anti-discrimination laws

- discrimination against non-religious people
- coercive control in cults and high-demand groups
- bodily autonomy (voluntary assisted dying, abortion rights)

We were less active in advocating for reforms in other campaign areas:

## Democracy reforms

- integrity in government
- truth in political advertising

## Science in society

- science denialism
- drug law reform
- countering pseudoscience
- valuing science



## Census – Not Religious?

This is a screenshot from the 2021 campaign website. We are now working with a coalition of organisations in planning for a new campaign for the 2026 Census.

# Joint campaigns

## Census religion question

We continued to work with several non-religious and pro-secular organisations in advocating for reform of the Census question on religion. The coalition of groups engaged with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as part of that agency's official consultation process over several years and into the 2024/25 year.

Regrettably, the ABS announced earlier this year it would be re-using the old biased and coercive question that assumes every respondent has a religion.

In the first half of 2025, the coalition of groups reconvened to begin planning for a new public campaign to coincide with the 2026 Census.

The RSA also continues to advocate on this issue separately, such as by raising concerns directly with the ABS. For example, in response to our concerns about the decision to re-use the flawed question for 2026, the ABS told us in March 2025 that religious groups had had a "strong desire" to keep the old question.

## Secularism Australia Forum

Following the Secularism Australia Conference in late 2023, many of the sponsoring organisations and other interested parties decided to establish the Secularism Australia Forum. The Forum meets a few times a year to share information and discuss opportunities for collaboration.

As part of the Forum, the RSA pitched the idea for non-religious, ex-religious and pro-secular organisations to support our submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (fourth cycle) into Australia's human rights. Eight organisations agreed to endorse the submission, detailing a number of examples of discriminatory and unfair treatment, on the basis of religion and belief, against non-religious Australians in government institutions and programs.

Collaboration on the drafting of the submission took place over a number of months in the first half of 2025 (and the submission was then lodged with the UN Human Rights Council in July 2025).



House of Representatives  
Photo: Gerda (Unsplash)

# Our impact

These are some of the highlights of our advocacy work in 2024/25.

## Blasphemy laws in Tasmania / Sacrilege laws in South Australia

In late 2024, the Tasmanian government abolished blasphemy laws in response to our advocacy. The state parliament passed legislation that included clauses to remove blasphemy provisions from two existing acts.

Tasmania's attorney-general thanked us "for bringing this matter to our attention". In early 2023, the RSA had asked the state government to remove blasphemy from the law books, arguing such provisions "had no place in modern-day Tasmania".

The RSA has been leading the push for South Australia to abolish its sacrilege laws. After charges were laid against a man for sacrilege earlier this year, the RSA featured in media articles and radio interviews, calling on the government to act.

## Religious dominance of Anzac Day Dawn Services

We continued to lead the push for the Australian War Memorial to make its annual Anzac Day Dawn Services more meaningful for all Australians instead of them resembling Christian church services. For yet another year, the Anzac Day service featured several acts of Christian worship, with significant sections presided over by a Christian chaplain.

We launched an online petition, attracting almost 1500 signatures. The issue gained media attention (including in *Crikey* and *The Guardian*), with a number of non-religious veterans speaking out on the need for reform.



**Australian War Memorial**  
Photo: Neon Wang (Unsplash)

The RSA, joined by non-religious veterans, met with the War Memorial in June 2025 to discuss the issue.

## Coercive control in cults

We helped to put on the radar of state/territory governments the need to extend coercive control laws to cults and high-demand groups. Cult survivors have been leading the push on this issue. We added our voice to their efforts in late 2024 when we wrote to all attorneys-general.

Early in 2025, the Victorian Parliament established a committee inquiry into the matter. We welcomed this in comments published in *The Age* and we have continued to feature the voices of cult survivors in our advocacy work.

## Prayers in parliament / government

We spearheaded the push for parliaments and local councils to remove acts of Christian worship from their formal

proceedings. In 2024/25, we engaged with MPs, ministers, premiers, opposition leaders, presiding officers, relevant parliamentary committees and local councillors in all states.

The RSA featured in a number of ABC radio interviews on the topic.

## Military chaplaincy

As part of our long-running campaign for Defence to provide a non-religious frontline wellbeing support option for its majority non-religious workforces in Army and Air Force, in late 2024 we revealed that an independent tribunal had found "strong demand" for Navy's "complementary" non-religious pastoral care alternative.

Then, in early 2025, we revealed that an investigation into the scandal-plagued Air Force chaplaincy branch raised concerns about theology clashing with Defence values – adding weight to concerns over Defence's reliance on religious chaplains.

# Submissions

These are the submission we made in the 2024/25 financial year:

**June 2025:** Submission to the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review (federal)

**February 2025:** Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's 'Inquiry into the Department of Defence Annual Report 2023-24' (federal)

**October 2024:** Submission to the joint state/territory and federal governments' Revitalising National Competition Policy initiative



In July 2024, we welcomed the Productivity Commission's decision to stand firm, in the face of pressure from religious lobbyists and politicians, and call for removal of Basic Religious Charities (BRCs).

In the final report for its inquiry into philanthropy, *Future foundations of giving*, the Commission made the recommendation in order to "enhance regulatory consistency and public transparency". In two previous submissions to the Commission's inquiry, we called for removal of BRCs and their exemptions to financial reporting and governance standards.

Throughout 2024/25, we then continued to call on the Albanese government to support the Commission's recommendation.

## Our platforms

Our members and the wider public engaged with our advocacy work via a number of communications platforms during 2024/25.

### RSA website

The rationalist.com.au website is our primary public interface. It features information about the RSA, our campaigns and advocacy updates.

The website recorded 26,704 visitor sessions (although, two weeks of data was lost). That compared to 33,422 in 2023/24. We published 107 articles about our campaigns during the period.

### Rationale magazine

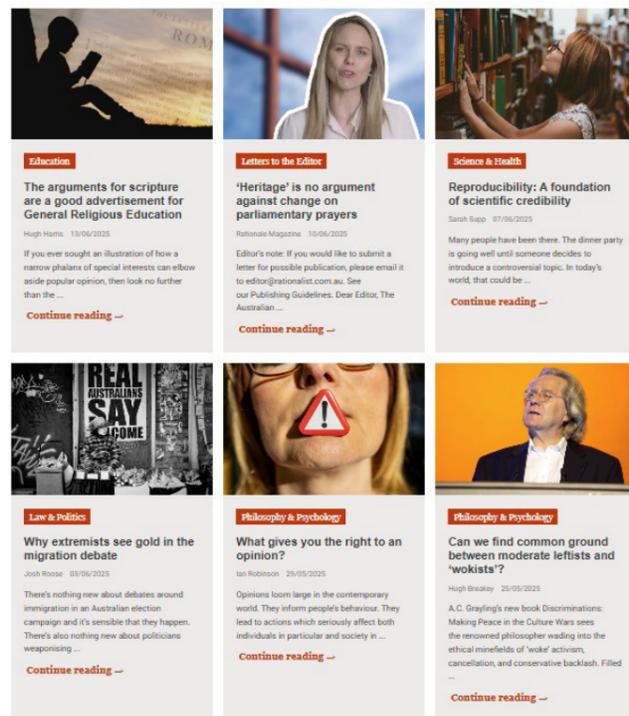
Rationalemagazine.com was established in 2021 when the RSA transitioned from the hardcopy journey. Since then, we have aimed to continue the legacy of the journal by ensuring *Rationale* is a source of high-quality original articles by rationalist thinkers, and a place where our members and supporters can share ideas and arguments on a wide range of topics.

In 2024/25, we continued to publish articles and letters on a regular basis. The website recorded almost 18,000 visits (17,676). That represented a decline from approximately 20,000 visitors in 2023/24.

We published a total of 109 pieces (compared to 118 in 2023/24). Of these, 67 were original (61.5%). This compared with 68% in 2023/24. We published 33 letters in total on our Letters to the Editor column (for members only).

### The Secular Agenda podcast

We published eight episodes (compared to nine in 2023/24). Six of these episodes



featured interviews with people advocating for secular reform in different policy areas. In total, we recorded 1,112 downloads. This was an increase from 943 in 2023/24.

### Social media

We frequently shared all kinds of content about our advocacy work and *Rationale* articles on various social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn and YouTube. In late 2024, we also established an account on Bluesky.

We had more than 10,200 followers on Facebook, 2,700 on X, and 500 on Bluesky. Plus, we had almost 400 subscribers on YouTube, where we published 29 videos.

Numerous pieces of content went 'viral' on these social media platforms, reaching thousands of people.

## Our members and donors

The RSA's work is made possible due to the generous support of our members and donors. As of November 2025, we have **341 paid-up members**. In addition to that, we have **two life members** (Meredith Doig and Ian Robinson) and **eight honorary members**.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our members, whose ongoing subscriptions provide stability and continuity, and to our donors, whose additional contributions make possible the growth of our advocacy and outreach.

Also, we have 1580 subscribers to our mailing list and weekly email bulletin, *RSA Weekly*.

# 351 members

## Financials

For the year ended 30 June 2025

The RSA continued to operate with an annual deficit, with expenditure exceeding revenue. While this approach has enabled us to deliver meaningful advocacy and programs, particularly through the employment of a full-time Executive Director and part-time Administrator, it is not sustainable in the long term, and remains a key challenge for the organisation.

Despite this deficit, the RSA maintained operations due to careful budgeting, prudent management of reserves, and the support of our dedicated members and donors. The RSA's investment portfolio also performed well over the year, providing valuable supplementary income and helping to bolster our overall financial position.

Looking ahead, the RSA will continue to manage its resources responsibly and seek opportunities to improve its financial sustainability.

**Stella Thomas, Treasurer**

### Consolidated statement of surplus or deficit

	2025	2024
Total income	76,463	48,053
Total expenditure	137,041	142,529
<b>Current year deficit before income tax</b>	<b>(60,578)</b>	<b>(94,476)</b>
<b>Net current year deficit</b>	<b>(60,578)</b>	<b>(94,476)</b>

### Consolidated statement of financial position

	2025	2024
Current assets		
Cash & cash equivalents	45,717	33,456
Trade & other receivables	465	-
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>46,182</b>	<b>33,456</b>
Non-current assets		
Franking credits receivable	-	12,421
Vanguard shares	630,809	608,885
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>630,809</b>	<b>621,307</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>676,991</b>	<b>654,763</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>4,417</b>	<b>4,946</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>672,574</b>	<b>649,817</b>

The full financial statement will be available on the ACNC website.



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**Published: November 2025**