

# 2012 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

DATE: Thursday 18 October 2012  
TIME: 6.30pm for the AGM  
VENUE: Graduate House – 220 Leicester Street, Carlton

## 1. Election of Chair

It was moved that Lyn Allison be elected Chair for the meeting.

Moved: Ian Robinson  
Seconded: Diane Preston  
Motion carried.

## 2. Apologies

Apologies were received from the following Members:

112 Joyce Dodds

## 3. Proxies

Proxies and directions for voting on motions previously circulated were received from the following Members:

<u>Member</u>	<u>In Favour Of</u>	<u>Voting</u>
73 Graziano Birgi	Meredith Doig	Motion 6.1 below – in favour Motion 6.2 below – in favour
110 Laadan Fletcher	The Chair (Lyn Allison)	Motion 6.1 below – in favour Motion 6.2 below – in favour
207 Peter Trebilco	The Chair (Lyn Allison)	Motion 6.1 below – in favour Motion 6.2 below – in favour
329 Douglas Warwick Dunstan	The Chair (Lyn Allison)	Motion 6.1 below – in favour Motion 6.2 below – in favour
388 David Freeman	Meredith Doig	Motion 6.1 below – in favour Motion 6.2 below – against
683 Trevor Lee	Meredith Doig	No direction given.

## 4. Quorum

Members in attendance:

133	Jason Ball	506	David Stimson
159	Diane Preston	545	Leonard Buller
218	Ken Wright	629	Rohan Navaratne
229	David McKenzie	781	Tania Rook
411	Lyn Allison	824	Meredith Doig
440	Wal Parker	846	David Muschamp
491	Ian Robinson	1181	Rod Bower

A quorum of at least 10 members being present, the AGM was officially declared open at 19:17

## 5. Minutes of the previous AGM

It was moved that the Minutes of the 2011 AGM, previously circulated with the invitation to the 2012 AGM, be accepted as a true and correct record.

Moved: Meredith Doig

Seconded : Wal Parker

Motion carried.

## 6. Business arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the 2011 AGM minutes.

## 7. Reports

### 7.1. President's report

The last year has proven to be a watershed in the history of the Rationalists in Australia.

The Rationalist Society is the oldest freethought group in Australia, dating from an initial meeting in Ormond College at Melbourne University in 1906. Over the decades there have been many ups and downs, and the last 12 months has added yet another dramatic chapter to the history of the rationalist movement in Australia.

During 2011 there was a protracted dispute within the board of the Society's sibling organisation, the Rationalist Association of Australia (RAA). The dispute centred on the approach that should be taken to investing the Rationalists' financial assets; over the last decade, the value of the portfolio had diminished by around 75%, with most of the losses occurring *before* the Global Financial Crisis of 2008.

This dispute was finally resolved in December 2011 by a legal Deed of Settlement that transferred all remaining financial assets from the Association to the Society. For this to happen, the Society had to be an incorporated association and this was achieved at last year's AGM.

Since then the Society has set up a formal Investment Committee that provides advice to the Committee of Management on a prudent investment policy. Most of the assets are now invested in a series of rolling term deposits.

As members may imagine, this dispute has consumed a lot of time and effort over the last 12 months. We hope over the next 12 months we can refocus that energy to building the organisation to pursue our aims and objectives – for a more rational, more humane and less bigoted Australian society.

## **Campaigns**

### *Religious Education in Schools*

The fight against ACCESS Ministries' evangelical mission to 'make disciples' in Victorian government schools has continued during the year. In March, three families challenged the Victorian Department of Education in VCAT (Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal), claiming their children had been discriminated against due to the way the Department chooses to administer the Education and Training Reform Act. No judgment has come down from this case as at the time of writing ... The RSA has continued to support and work with the parents' group FIRIS (Fairness in Religion in Schools) in this campaign.

In March, I was invited to appear before the NSW Legislative Inquiry into the provision of Ethics Classes in that state. In the RSA's submission to the Inquiry, we argued *against* the provision of Ethics Education as an alternative to Special Religious Education. This is not because we object to education about ethics nor do we object to education about religions but because the system as is necessarily divides children according to their religious affiliations (or rather, the religious affiliations of their parents). This only goes to exacerbate social division rather than facilitate social inclusion, and it fails to educate children about the important role of the various systems of belief, religious and not religious, that exist in Australia.

At the Federal level, we have continued to provide advice to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on education about religions and other belief systems in the national curriculum. Sensibly, ACARA have rejected the proposal, put by some religionists, to have a separate subject on Religion, opting instead to incorporate knowledge about the role of religions across various humanities subjects, particularly Civics and Citizenship. They are also placing emphasis on the development of General Capabilities like Critical Thinking, Ethical Behaviour and Intercultural Understanding. The RSA strongly supports this approach.

### *Human Rights*

The RSA also put in a submission to the Victorian Government Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious Organisations. This submission took an unusual approach, arguing that religious organisations are subject to the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and are therefore obliged to eliminate or minimise the risk of harm to the public that arises from the conduct of their undertaking. The failure of the Catholic Church to put in place systems to eliminate or minimise risks to children means the Church is in breach of its duties under the Act, and is therefore subject to prosecution under the Act. We called for the Victorian WorkCover

Authority to actively initiate investigations and to prosecute appropriate cases against religious organisations and their officers.

### *Census*

Along with other freethought organisations, the RSA lobbied hard in the lead up to the 2011 census for people to mark “No Religion” if they were not in fact actively religious. And it seems to have worked! The census demonstrated conclusively that there is a long term trend of decreasing affiliation with Christianity, from 96% in 1911 to 61% a hundred years later in 2011. The biggest single change was the increase in those stating they had “No Religion”, to a total of almost 5 million respondents. The option of “No Religion” was first offered in 1971 and at that time, about 7% chose it; this doubled to 13% in 1991 and it’s now 22% - that means over one in five Australians consciously assert they are *not* religious.

The next step is to continue lobbying to change the census question so that it doesn’t lead respondents to tick a box marked with a religion when in fact they may be only ‘culturally religious’. This is important because the allocation of government resources depends on the census data.

### *Events*

Taking advantage of the Global Atheist Convention in April, we organised a very successful Fringe Event entitled “The Road Less Travelled: Can Atheists and Believers Work Together?” This event featured Chris Stedman of the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy Office, science blogger PZ Myers, and Melbourne ethicist Leslie Cannold.

We also helped host an event launching Lawrence Krauss’s new book “A Universe from Nothing” at Embiggen Books.

### *Outreach*

As President I have made regular presentations at a variety of events, sometimes to other freethought groups and sometimes to conferences: Mordialloc Skeptics, Atheists, Australian Skeptics, Ron Williams at Embiggen Books, Central Victorian Atheists and Freethought Group, Singularity Summit, Nunawading Uniting Church. Drew Harvey of the RSA Committee spoke at the Humanist Plus conference.

I have also met with leaders of other freethought groups to discuss matters of mutual interest: Liberty Victoria, Sex Party of Australia, Victorian Humanists, Fairness in Religion in Schools, Religion and Ethics Education Network of Australia.

### *Management*

As mentioned above, settlement of the dispute within the RAA consumed a lot of time and effort in the early part of the year. Since then, the Committee has settled down but there is still unfinished business.

Among other things, we have yet to settle on an optimum form of communications with our members and the general public. In June we sent out the first of a new quarterly newsletter (in hard copy because many members do not have an email address). But this does not constitute

an adequate replacement for our previous flagship journal, the *Australian Rationalist*. We are still working on this.

We are also working on simplifying our website and hope to have the new look site launched before the end of the year.

Financially we are now stable, with investments overseen by an independent and professionally qualified committee.

In August we conducted a strategy planning day, and as is usual with these things, came up with more ideas than we could implement with the resources we have available. Nevertheless, one major decision was to organise an Australian tour for Sean Faircloth, Director of Policy and Strategy at the Richard Dawkins Foundation in the US. The Sydney Opera House has already indicated their interest in hosting a major event with Sean and several venues here in Melbourne are also interested. Watch this space.

### *Thanks*

I would like to thank all the committee members for their voluntary time and valuable expertise. The RSA would not exist without people like them who are prepared to put in the hard yards to help make society a better place for us all: free from superstition and bigotry, with public policy based on reason and evidence.

Dr Meredith Doig  
President

It was moved that the President's Report be accepted.

Moved: Jason Ball

Seconded: Rod Bower.

Motion carried.

## **7.2. Secretary's report**

At the 2011 AGM, I mentioned to a member that I had not, as yet, done any mass mailouts to members regarding membership renewal. He asked why that was, which prompted me to realise there was no reason. We have the technology. As a result of that comment, only seven members were not contacted in the last financial year. This was because their memberships were fully up to date and there was no need to get in touch.

The number of renewal requests sent out increased by 328% between the 1011 and 1112 financial years. I also started to make a note of what prompted members to renew. This showed that 87% of members renew based on the RSA renewal form being sent out. 7% renew based on the automated email that is sent as part of the website functionality. The remaining 6% renew based on reasons I cannot determine. However, this shows the comment made at the last AGM has been very successful in terms of encouraging members to renew.

It has not all been good news. In the 1112 financial year, memberships dropped by 25%. This is partly because we could not allow journal only memberships to renew, no freebie memberships were granted to journal contributors and some people chose to drop their memberships given there would be no more journals for a while. We also saw the number of new members halve, which can be attributed to not having enough opportunities to advertise for new members. However, as we are now actively tracking these statistics on a monthly basis, we will have more information as to what works in terms of generating and keeping members and what does not.

It was moved that the Secretary's Report be accepted.

Moved: Rod Bower

Seconded: Ian Robinson

Motion carried.

### **7.3. Treasurer's report**

In the past, the RSA relied heavily on the RAA, in particular to pay costs for The Australian Rationalist, which was delivered to members as part of their membership. The RAA also paid for secretarial costs. This relationship broke down and now the RSA has the funds of the RAA. Cash and investments worth \$605,277 were transferred from RAA to RSA.

Journal costs in the Income and Expenditure statement relates only to costs associated with issue 88, all other costs were paid by the RAA. Apart from this item, membership would have covered all other operating expenses.

The overall result was a deficit of \$10,279.

The transfer of assets from RAA to RSA occurred so late in the financial year that there was virtually no income from the investment of the RAA income (we would expect a different result next year).

We are running a draft budget at present. The forthcoming 12 months will be the first full year where RSA is responsible for its funds. A draft budget will be adhered to which could result in a deficit. There are potentially two bequests coming in, which will offset any loss. The question is balancing bequests and donations against pursuing the objectives of the RSA. The RSA needs to make decisions in the best interests of the movement without running the capital assets down too far. Over the years, we may go up and down a bit but will not go back to speculative and imprudent investing.

It was moved that the Treasurer's Report be accepted.

Moved: Ken Wright

Seconded: Diane Preston

Motion carried.

Rationalist Society of Australia Inc.  
ABN 41 853 904 694

**Income and Expenditure Statement**

1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012

Income

Membership fees	10,698		
Member donations	1,355		
Interest earned	1,101		
Journal sales and subscriptions	78		
Sales of goods	<u>774</u>		14,006

Expenditure

Journal costs			
Authors & contributors	2,164		
Printing	<u>11,418</u>		13,582
Operating expenses			
Bank charges	25		
Paypal charges	94		
Interest paid	174		
Meeting expenses	198		
PO Box, postage	406		
RSA stationery	65		
Secretarial	2,677		
Travel	139		
Website maintenance	<u>385</u>		4,163
Marketing expenses			
RSA brochure	1,473		
Standup banner	265		
Temporary tattoos	<u>1,550</u>		3,288
Campaigns and events			
Census campaign	1,625		
Central Vic Atheist group	50		
Global Atheist Convention	53		
"Road Less Travelled" event	424		
Krauss book launch	300		
"Humanity Plus" conference	300		
Reason Australia membership	<u>500</u>	<u>3,252</u>	<u>24,285</u>

Excess of expenditure over income 10,279

Rationalist Society of Australia Inc.  
ABN 41 853 904 694

**Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2012**

Assets

Current assets

Bankmecu cheque account	51,796		
Bankmecu term deposit due 16/9/12	300,000		
Paypal	<u>168</u>	351,964	

Deferred asset

Bankmecu term deposit due 9/5/15		127,000	
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Investments

Tanami Gold NL	117,807		
Silver City Mining Co Ltd	<u>10,000</u>	<u>127,807</u>	<u>606,771</u>

Equity

Retained earnings of previous years	11,773		
Received from Rationalist Association	<u>605,277</u>	617,050	

Less current year deficit		<u>10,279</u>	<u>606,771</u>
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## 8. Previously circulated motions.

### 8.1. That Clause 32 (regarding the setting and administration of a Public Fund) of the Rules be deleted.

Explanation: The RSA adopted new Rules at last year's AGM as a result of the process of incorporation. At that time, we were under the impression the RSA Inc. could establish a Public Fund to which people could make tax deductible donations. Further research showed the RSA is ineligible for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, and so the Public Fund clause is no longer needed.

*"32. Public Fund*

*The Society shall establish and maintain a Public Fund called the "Rationalist Society of Australia Public Fund".*

*The Public Fund shall be administered by a subcommittee of at least three persons appointed by the committee. A majority of the members of the subcommittee shall, because of their tenure of some public office or their professional or public standing, have an underlying community responsibility as distinct from obligations solely in regard to the objects of the Society.*



*A separate bank account will be opened with a bank or such other authorised deposit taking institution as determined by the subcommittee, in the name of Rationalist Society of Australia Public Fund, to deposit money donated to the Public Fund and money from the realisation of property donated to the Public Fund and interest accruing on such monies.*

*No monies or assets in the Public Fund shall be distributed to members or officers of the Society except as reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred on behalf of the Society or proper remuneration for administrative services.*

*At the winding up of the Public Fund, the Society will transfer any surplus assets of the Public Fund to any organisation with similar purposes, being an organisation not carried on for the profit or gain of its members, as nominated by the committee of the Society.”*

Moved: Meredith Doig

Seconded: Wal Parker

Motion carried.

## **8.2. That a standard indemnity clause be added to the Rules, to be inserted as a replacement Clause 32:**

*“That every Committee member and office-holder of the Society shall be indemnified out of the funds of the Society against any liability incurred in defending proceedings, whether civil or criminal, in which judgement is given in his or her favour or in which he or she is acquitted or in connection with any application under the Act in which relief is granted by the Court in respect of any negligence, default, breach of duty or breach of trust.”*

Moved: Meredith Doig

Seconded: Ian Robinson

This clause is intended to say that if civil or criminal proceedings are brought against an office holder as a result of their association with the RSA, the office holder will be protected. The issue only arises when an office holder is charged for an activity done whilst discharging office duties. As the meaning is not entirely clear, Diane Preston proposed the following alternative version:

*That every committee member, director and office holder of the Society shall be indemnified out of the funds of the Society against:*

- 1. any liability (including without limitation liability for damaged and for defence costs) incurred in any civil proceeding in which the Society is involved or in which that person is involved because of their position as a member, director or office holder of the Society, irrespective of whether the Society or that member successfully defends that proceeding; and*
- 2. any liability for defence costs incurred by that person in any criminal prosecution against the Society, irrespective of whether the Society is found guilty to acquitted; and*

*3. any liability for defence costs incurred by that person in any criminal prosecution against that person because of their position as a member, director or office holder of the Society, provided that person is acquitted.*

The mover withdrew the original motion in favour of the alternative motion, and the amended motion was carried.

## 9. Election of a Committee

Nominations were received from the following members:

- Lyn Allison
- Jason Ball
- Rod Bower
- Meredith Doig
- Diane Preston
- Tania Rook
- Ken Wright

There being no other nominations, these members were declared duly elected to the RSA Committee until the next AGM.

## 10. Any other business

No other business was received within the required timeframe to be considered for the 2012 AGM.

## 11. Close of meeting.

The meeting was officially closed 20:04

Tania Rook

Secretary

Date: 29.01.2013