

Minutes of Annual General Meeting

Rationalist Society of Australia

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Date: 30 June 2008

Time: 6.30pm

Address: 4/99 William St, MELBOURNE

1

Formal Matters

Motion: That Ian Robinson be chair for the meeting.

Moved by: Meredith Doig

Seconded by: Kevin Childs

Carried without dissent.

Present

David Stimson, Don Riddiford, Wal Parker, Ian Robinson, Jean Melzer, David Freeman, Brian McKinley, David McKenzie, Kevin Childs, Meredith Doig, Catherine McDonald, John Perkins, Elise Jones.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Lois Sweet, Peter Dumble, Graeme and Lorelle McKenzie, Tony Lamb, Edward Infield, Graham McGill, Bodye Darvill, Charmian Crosbie Goold

Motion. That apologies be accepted

Moved by: David Stimson

Seconded by: David McKenzie

Carried without dissent.

Proxies

In favour of the chairman of the meeting:

Geoffrey Swayn, Leonard Dowling, Robert Horman, Gayle Ashton, Edward Forbes, Vince Hayward, Graham McGill, Louise Rodbourn, Warwick Dunstan, Robert Phillips, Dr. RG Bourne, Margaret Simpson, Christine Graunas, Derek O'Reilly, John Lutz, Daniel Teghe, Michael Kowalik, Brendan Murphy, Walter Frank, John May, Kevin Rees, Barry Quirk (22)

In favour of David McKenzie:

LC and MS Svendsen, Anthony Lamb, Graeme McKenzie (4)

In favour of the Acting Secretary:

Jacques Peron (1)

There being 13 financial members present, plus 27 proxies, the Chair declared a quorum was present.

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Minutes of last meeting

The Minutes of the last AGM, held at 12.30pm on Saturday 24th February 2007 at the Dorset Gardens Hotel/Motel, were tabled.

Motion: That the minutes be accepted as a true record.

Moved by: Meredith Doig

Seconded by: Jean Melzer

Carried without dissent.

3

Business Arising from the Minutes

It was noted that, at the last AGM approval had been obtained to increase the membership fees to \$30 for a full single membership and \$40 for a full couples membership, and \$20 for a single concession and \$30 for a couples concession (but the increases had not been implemented). Therefore, it would not be necessary to put motions 5 (i) to 5 (l) regarding subscription increases on this meeting's agenda.

4 (a)

President's Report

The President Ian Robinson read his report (see attached) and said he would have it printed in the newsletter. The President paid tribute to retiring members of the Committee Lois Sweet, Brian McKinley and Elise Jones, and noted the passing of former Committee member Blanche Merz.

A vote of thanks to these members was moved by Brian McKinley, seconded by Elise Jones and carried without dissent.

Motion: That the President's report be received.

Moved by: Catherine McDonald

Seconded by: Kevin Childs

Carried without dissent.

4 (b)

Secretary's Report

The Acting Secretary Meredith Doig gave a brief report on improvements to the administrative systems of the Society (see attached).

A member commented that the website currently 'flows well' and the design should not be too much disturbed. Another member noted that the website presently carries a 'high rating', meaning that it comes up top of the list when a Google search is done on the search term 'rationalist'. This is very valuable and every attempt should be made to retain this in any redesign of the website.

Motion: That the Secretary's report be received.

Moved by: Kevin Childs

Seconded by: David McKenzie

Carried without dissent.

4 (c)

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported that there had been only one cheque written on the RSA account since the last AGM. The current balance of the account is \$1722.89. See attached.

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Other costs incurred by the RSA Committee have been paid directly from the RAA account. The Treasurer noted that the RAA expends approximately \$90,000 per year on Rationalist activities. These funds come from the interest earned on investments. These investments have suffered declining returns over the last year because of the general decline in the market, and should the poor market conditions persist, expenditure will have to be trimmed.

Upon learning that each issue of the *Australian Rationalist* costs about \$8,300, a member commented that the membership subscriptions would fall far short of covering the full cost of four issues per year. The Treasurer agreed, noting that the cost of publishing the journal is about five to six times the revenue earned through memberships. However, the journal is considered the RSA's 'flagship' publication, widely respected and bringing in members from many parts of Australia.

A member queried the extent of distribution of the journal and was informed that, apart from the 400+ members, it went to about 400 libraries and about 400 newsagencies around Australia. The Committee is in the process of evaluating other avenues of expanding the distribution of the journal.

Motion: That the Treasurer's report be received.

Moved by: David McKenzie

Seconded by: Elise Jones

Carried without dissent.

5

Consideration of motions on notice

The following motions regarding changes to the Constitution had been received with the requisite 21 days' notice.

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| a) Clause 3 (b) be changed <u>from</u> "The subscription shall become payable on 1st July for the financial year commencing on that day" <u>to</u> "The subscription shall become payable on the anniversary of a member's admission to the Society." | m: MD | s: CM | Carried |
| b) Clause 4 (d) "A member desiring to resign must give notice to that effect before August in each year, otherwise the member shall be liable for the current year's subscription" <u>be deleted</u> . | m: MD | s: BMcK | Carried |
| c) Clause 10 (e) "The retiring office-bearers and committee members shall be deemed to have been nominated unless the Secretary is notified in writing to the contrary" <u>be deleted</u> . | m: MD | s: BMcK | Carried |
| d) Clause 11 (c) be changed <u>from</u> "Seven members shall constitute a quorum at meetings of the Committee" <u>to</u> "Five members shall constitute a quorum at meetings of the Committee." | m: DMcK | s: EJ | Carried |
| e) Clause 11 (d) "All proceedings shall be recorded in the minute book" <u>be deleted</u> and instead clause 13 (a) on the duties of the Secretary be changed <u>from</u> "To attend all meetings of members and of the Committee and to see that the minutes of the same are correctly kept" <u>to</u> "To attend all meetings of members and of the Committee, | m: MD | s: BMcK | Carried |

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write the minutes and ensure they are correctly kept.”

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|----|--|-------|---------|---------|
| f) | Clause 13 (c) on the duties of the Secretary be changed <u>from</u> “To initiate functions and arrange speakers” <u>to</u> “Ensure that functions are initiated and speakers are arranged” | m: MD | s: DMcK | Carried |
| g) | Clause 13 (d) on the duties of the Secretary be changed <u>from</u> “To write submissions, reports, make press statements, and attend to promotional matters from time to time as the occasion arises, or as the Committee directs” <u>to</u> “To ensure submissions and reports are written, press statements issued, and promotional matters attended to from time to time as the occasion arises, or as the Committee directs” | m: MD | s: DMcK | Carried |
| h) | Clause 9 (a) be changed <u>from</u> “The management of the business and affairs of the Society shall be vested in a Committee consisting of a President, Two Vice-Presidents, immediate past President, Secretary, Treasurer and seven committee members” <u>to</u> “The management of the business and affairs of the Society shall be vested in a Committee consisting of a President, and Vice President, immediate past President, Secretary, Treasurer and five committee members.” | m: MD | s: CMcD | Carried |

6

Election of Committee Members

Nominations had been received from:

Ian Robinson for President, David McKenzie for Vice-President and Treasurer, Meredith Doig for Secretary, Catherine McDonald, Kevin Childs, and Bodye Darvill. Peter Dumble is Immediate Past President.

The number of nominations being less than the number of vacancies for the Committee, the Chair declared all duly elected.

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Any Other Business

There being no other business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.50pm.

CLOSE OF MEETING

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President's Report

Although technically this is the annual report for the 2006-2007 Financial Year, since the 2007-2008 year has only a few hours to run, in this report I will deal with ongoing matters covering the whole two years in question.

The past eighteen months have been a time of consolidation for the Rationalist Society. We have been going through a period of reorganization in the wake of the retirement of long-serving Secretary/Treasurer, Lois Sweet.

At a meeting of the Committee in April 2008, Meredith Doig was elected Acting Secretary and David McKenzie was elected Acting Treasurer. Since then Meredith and David have worked very hard to bring the records and finances of the Society up to date and to organize them in an effective way and to institute modern computer-based record-keeping and communications systems. Meredith and David will talk more about these matters in their reports.

We also co-opted onto the committee a number of people who have been, and still are, contributing significantly to the work of the RSA: Kevin Childs, Bodye Darvill and Cathy McDonald. They are standing for election proper to the committee tonight and I commend them to you.

Most of the regular activities of the Society have continued. Kevin Childs has taken over as Editor of the Australian Rationalist from Elise Jones and enhanced its already high reputation.

Bodye Darvill has taken over from me in producing the monthly Newsletter and has made it an interesting vehicle for opinion as well as information.

We have had increased exposure of the Rationalists through media releases, appearances on ABC radio, and in newspapers, most recently in the Brisbane Courier-Mail. Next Sunday I am speaking at a rally in Melbourne to protest the huge amount of public money being spent on the visit of the Pope, a man whose conservative pronouncements have caused much suffering around the world. Details will be circulated and watch the press for information. Due to lack of omniscience the meeting to finalise the details was inadvertently scheduled for right now and clashed with our meeting.

We had a number of talks at the Trades Hall in 2006-7 organised by Cathy McDonald. The coalition of small groups sponsoring the Trades Hall talks series ceased at the end of 2007 and we have not unilaterally sponsored any talks so far this year. We are planning to have a series of talks in the second half of the year. We are still looking for a more suitable venue, as we didn't think the Trades Hall served our purposes.

The Website has been moderately successful: we have had 8670 visits since it started in October 2005, which is nearly 10 a day. However we hope to do better with a revamp being overseen by Cathy McDonald and Meredith Doig, which will enable us to streamline our operations, join up members on line and to restrict access to some parts of the site to members only.

We have produced a pamphlet promoting Rationalism and the Rationalist Society which is at the printers as we speak.

Clare Callow has written the first draft of a History of Rationalism in Australia and Brian McKinlay will be working with her to produce the final draft for publication.

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Ian Robinson and Cathy McDonald are working on producing a small booklet on Rationalism which will argue our philosophy and present our policies.

In the ensuing months, as well as projects mentioned above, we are planning to restart our talks program, to make a submission to the Federal Tax Review, to improve circulation of the journal to reach a wider audience, to issue media releases when needed, to work towards preparing a Vision for Australia statement similar to Vision for Europe recently adopted by the EU, and to continue to campaign vigorously for the separation of church and state and against public subsidy of religious superstition in its many forms.

Finally I'd like to pay tribute to four former members of the committee.

Brian McKinlay has only been with us a short time and he is continuing his rationalist involvement as a member of the RAA Board and by working with Clare Callow on the History.

Elise Jones has been a distinguished Editor of the Australian Rationalist for a number of years and brought her considerable editorial and organisational skills to produce this widely admired journal of opinion. The success of the Religious Fundamentalism conference at Dante's owed much to her input. We will miss her insights and the perspective of the younger generation that she brought to our deliberations.

One of our longest serving committee members, Blanche Merz, passed away last year. She always contributed creatively to committee discussion and in the last few years organised a number of our successful conferences. We will miss her wisdom and experience and her ability to think outside the box.

Finally, after more than sixty years on the RSA committee, Lois Sweet has retired. Very few people in any organization would be able to boast that length of dedicated service. I think it would be true to say that Lois has devoted most of her adult life to the rationalist movement and has worked tirelessly and selflessly for the cause. She is already a life member of the organization, but the committee would like to honour her years of service with a testimonial function later this year. We are still negotiating the exact form it will take, but please look out for an announcement and try to attend.

Thank you all for your attendance tonight and for your on-going support.

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Secretary's Report

Since my co-option to the role of Acting Secretary in April 2008 I have –

- Created a new database of members and other relevant contacts
- Begun evaluating software that enables administration in an online environment
- Had the Committee commit to regular monthly meetings
- Contributed to a new informational pamphlet
- Contributed to a major update to the website
- Organised the AGM, including sending a notice of meeting to all members; ensured all the formalities were properly done, and organised the meeting place
- Organised distribution of the Journal to about 400 libraries to further raise its profile; this will be followed up next year with a brief questionnaire to check interest at these libraries by library users, and a invitation to become a paying subscriber
- Joined the RSA as a member of the Associations Forum, a national association of Not-For-Profit organisations. It is hoped this will provide access to valuable tips, tools and techniques for raising awareness, attracting and retaining members and better servicing members' needs.

Over the next 12 months it is hoped the administration of the Society's affairs will become largely automated, so that the valuable time and efforts of the Committee can focus on the real work of the RSA: raising awareness of the need for a rational approach to understanding social and political affairs in the face of encroaching superstition and bigotry.

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Treasurer's Report

RSA

RATIONALIST SOCIETY of AUSTRALIA

Annual General Meeting 2008 Financial Statement

Statement of Income and Expenditure for 17 months since
2007 Annual General Meeting

Income

Balance brought forward	\$2482.39
Subscriptions and donations	\$8363.25
Total Income	\$10,845.64

Expenditure

Bank fees	\$107.15
Currency Communications – Printing of Australian Rationalist + 2000 DLX envelopes	\$9015.60
Balance	\$1722.89
Total	\$10,845.64