

AFA President's Report

Annual General Meeting 2016

It's been another good year for atheism in Australia.

While our efforts made some contribution, we need to thank the various religious groups exposed by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse* for really demonstrating to the public at large the hollowness of their claims to moral superiority and leadership. We now know that the Catholic Church is no better than the Boy Scouts when it comes to moral behaviour, and indeed, probably worse.

Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society (PATAS)

A highlight of the year for me was attending the PATAS Conference in Manilla in May 2015.

I spoke to the delegates about the problem of clerical sexual abuse and the negative effect that the revelations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse had on people's perceptions of religion. I reminded the audience that in the Philippines, no priests or clerical figures had been charged with any offences despite overwhelming evidence that the offences were occurring. I pointed to the Australian experience as an example of a sound government response to the issue. It was great to meet many decent atheists from the Philippines and lend our support to the conference. Attitudes to Atheism are changing gradually in the Philippines and our support is valued by the members of PATAS. My attendance at the conference was self-funded and, apart from a registration fee of \$500 there was no cost to the AFA for this event. We have supported PATAS for the last couple of years and I hope will continue to do so.

AFA Events

The Unholy Trinity tours and the Robin Ince tour in March and April 2015 were a great success, in most venues to capacity audiences. These events were all organised with volunteer support, mostly by members of the committee, a huge effort that deserves recognition.

Planning for the next GAC is proceeding. As I write this report, we are waiting for a response to our application for funding from the Victorian Government. I will report on the outcome at the AGM. The committee recognise that unless we have enough funding to be able to employ qualified staff to organise and manage the event, the pressure on the committee to proceed with an all-volunteer management is too much, given that almost all committee members are involved in full time work. Regardless of the funding outcome, we are committed to bringing the Cosmic Genome to Australia in March 2017, either as a stand-alone event or in conjunction with the GAC.

Media

Social Media and forums were busy again this year. I refer you to the separate reports by committee members in charge of those areas. Management of this area is a huge effort by committee members, both in finding and publishing material and moderating the forums. We are lucky to have such a dedicated team in this respect.

The Australian Atheist now in a quarterly format, and has once again been extremely well received by our members and subscribers. An incredible effort by the editor Tracy Burgess.

During the year, we issued numerous media releases on a variety of topical issues, including gay marriage, the desperate attempts by the Baird government in NSW to keep secret from parents of schoolchildren the availability of ethics classes, the irony of the government's attack on the safe schools program and voluntary euthanasia. Thanks to the Communications Team for a fine effort.

Religious Freedom Roundtables

The AFA attended the first of Tim Wilson's "Religious Freedom Roundtables" in 2015 in Sydney. Subsequent events were cancelled when Wilson decided to enter politics. The need for the Roundtable was never clear to me or most atheists, as there appears to be no evidence to suggest there are any restrictions on religious freedoms in Australia, quite the reverse in fact with many laws giving religious groups freedom to ignore sensible anti-discrimination legislation.

AFA Committee Reports

The Treasurer's Report shows that our finances are in good shape and well managed by Julian Jordan.

I commend the various committee reports to you and thank all committee members for their contribution to the management of the Foundation.

Michael Boyd
March 2016