

AFA President's Report Annual General Meeting 2017

After taking over from Michael Boyd in 2016, I would say that this has been a very busy year for atheism. The continuation of the investigations by the Royal Commission into Institutional Abuse is sobering news, and along with the efforts of mainstream media to encourage Cardinal Pell to come home, it's been a "spotlight" on circumstances that do influence everyone of faith and without.

It's those who are without faith (or not even quite sure!) that has been the main focus since the last AGM – we did a successful fundraiser, numerous interviews and ran an enormous campaign with Census No Religion, to encourage people to think a little more beyond the Jedi jokes and Noodly appendages to put down their religious status (or lack of it) on the census. By the time this meeting is being held, we'll be in discussions and plans to address the media on what we suspect will be a strong turnout for those who follow in the footsteps of people internationally without any particular strong religious leaning – the "no's".

It has been problematic to discover with the running of Census No Religion to discover a large groundswell of anti-Islamic sentiment amongst Australians, who resort to outright misinformation about mosques and Sharia law in order to encourage people to identify as Christian on the census.

While Australia is a secular country (despite what Ita Buttrose says!) and has a diverse and multicultural population that should continue to be represented in the public space, the problematic issues involving religious beliefs will not be solved by outright falsehoods about their practices and their influences. I'm looking forward to future events where the realities can be discussed even-handedly, rather than being a part of what I suspect could be right-wing religious fundamentalists running scare tactics about minority groups.

We are currently promoting our first international tour with the Cosmic Shambles LIVE tour, and after securing funding by the Victorian Government, are in a better position to employ staff and prepare for the Global Atheist Convention. That will be happening on February 9-11th 2018 and it's been an intense effort from the committee to make it happen, both a strain on time and resources. It's the patience and dedication that I most admire from everyone involved and we hope that after the time that has elapsed since the last two efforts, we will continue to surprise and encourage thoughtful responses to the issues raised by the events.

As always, I'm incredibly grateful to our volunteers who have been responding to emails, helping with events, organizing this very AGM. It's been particularly difficult with what seems to be a trend towards people being busy with life and work, and while there's been a number of people who have left the AFA Committee for numerous reasons, I'd like to again extend a thanks to them all for what they have done for the foundation, particularly Janine Gerbert, Andrew Skegg, Adam Reakes, and Sarah Bluett. I sincerely hope we can all meet again at the next Global Atheist Convention, if not before.

Social Media and forums continue to be a lively space to encourage the perspectives of atheists in Australia and worldwide; the monitoring and management involves a tremendous effort by committee members, and we are very fortunate to have dedicated teams. We have released a number of media releases on topical issues, and while the Census No Religion campaign did dominate many of our presentations, we have tackled as many current affairs concerns that influence secular and humanist worldviews.

The Australian Atheist magazine continues to be published with great articles and ideas, with incredible effort by the editor Tracy Burgess and we thank the many contributors who continue to produce content. The treasurers report shows that our finances are in good shape and well managed by Julian Jordan. I sincerely hope that we can continue to boost membership numbers and volunteer efforts for the AFA and thanks to everyone involved in the membership and communications aspects.

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

Kylie Sturgess

7 March 2016

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President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia.