

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

19 October 2011

Dear Member

I'm delighted to provide the fourth President's Report, outlining the activities and achievements of your Association over the past 12 months.

The RTRA has firmly established itself as the voice of recreational trail bike riders and we are now working hard to ensure that the Association can deliver the *ears* as well.

Our mission of ensuring a sustainable future for recreational trail and quad bike riding relies more than ever on building strong and trusting relationships with those who hold the keys to the land on which we would ride.

We are trying to change negative perceptions of trail bike riding that have been ingrained over many years.

We are trying to win back trails that have been given over to walkers and mountain bike riders because there was never a voice that said "Hey – we're trail bike riders and we use those trails".

And – perhaps hardest of all – we're trying to get riders to understand *their role* in improving the public perception of trail bikes and trail bike riders.

This all needs effective dialogue and an element of give-and-take in good faith.

Our progress in establishing this platform of trust and goodwill can be seen in the projects that we have on the go – none of which would have been possible were it not for the longer term relationship building.

Before going on, it's worth reviewing the objectives that have been set for the Association. These are what give us the guidance to set priorities and decide on projects.

The RTRA was formed around four key objectives:

1. To protect and extend quality, safer off-road riding opportunities for Western Australian recreational trail bike riders of all ages.
2. To promote and encourage safety and responsible riding attitudes, including minimising noise and trail damage.
3. To actively pursue the needs of trail bike riders with government agencies, councils, landowners and other stakeholders.
4. To improve the perception of trail bike riding as a recreational activity amongst stakeholders and the broader community.

So what have we achieved over the past 12 months?

Membership

As of today we have 1,056 family memberships representing 2,070 riders.

As was the case last year, not all of these members are fully financial. While revenue from membership is important, the more critical issue is to continue to build member numbers. Put simply, the more riders that RTRA represents the greater will be our lobbying power and the more effective the Association will be as a communications conduit to riders.

Membership management is an area that we need to put more attention into. We have plans to create a tiered level of membership however without staff to delegate a project like this to it has proved difficult to move it up the priority list.

With an estimated 50,000 dirt bikes in WA there are still a lot of potential members out there!

Political Recognition

Our success in getting politicians to recognize the legitimacy of our activity was demonstrated in March when Parliament spent 4 hours debating trail bikes – and politicians from both sides agreed that it is a legitimate recreational activity that needs to be funded and provided for.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Roger Cook MLA, introduced a Private Members' Bill *"That the government immediately commits to implementing the Back on Track strategy and commits to funding this strategy in the 2011-12 budget"*

In support of the Bill, Mr Cook said: "The jury is in, the evidence is before us and the case has been made. It is time to implement this strategy. It is time that we provided a way forward for trail bike users in this state and some certainty for people who wish to undertake this legitimate pastime."

Although the motion was lost, the only objection raised by the government was that of timing. Clearly we have been effective in raising the level of awareness of the issues, and the State Trail Bike Strategy is seen as the solution.

We will continue to needle, cajole and push the government to commit the funding and necessary resources.

Advocacy

Effective advocacy is all about building relationships so that people in influence are favourably disposed towards our cause. This involves a delicate balance – being seen as reasonable and pragmatic on one hand but capable of stirring up plenty of noise and trouble when provoked or ignored!

In 2008 the RTRA turned the tide of Off Road Vehicle Area closures, and since then we have been building on this momentum, in particular at Pinjar which is seen as a model for the future development of other areas.

A significant achievement this year was the change in policy from the LotteryWest Trails Grant fund. Previously these grants (upon which the majority of trails development in WA relies) were available only for non-motorised trails.

This year, for the first time, that exclusion clause was dropped from the grant application documentation. And so in the soon-to-be-developed Hills Trails Master Plan, trail bikes will be considered as a trails user group for the first time ever.

We are now exploring opportunities to secure Trails Grant funding for more specific trail bike-related projects.

Trails and Riding Areas

Our 'hero' project is the Pinjar Off Road Vehicle Area. With the support of DEC this area is undergoing a major transformation and is progressively becoming a safer, more attractive, more family-friendly place for trail and quad bike riders – especially those not old enough to have a road licence.

Building on the success of the 'Pilot Trail' developed in 2008, two new one-way trails were commissioned in late 2010. A 1km 'PeeWee' Trail and a 6km 'Family' Trail were developed, with limestone surfacing to provide an easier to ride surface.

We have had some problems with the limestone surface, and the impact of larger quad bikes being ridden aggressively has degraded the trails, but the determination to improve this area has not waned.

In October 2011 another three trails were completed on the western side of Orchid Rd, as well as a new car park adjacent to the PeeWee trail that will enable family groups to park up and supervise the smallest riders.

Work is also progressing on a Pilot Trail Bike Trail at the Metro Road area down Brookton Highway. This 18km trail is being developed as a learning model to help understand how we can create sustainable trails for trail bike use. The trail is expected to be commissioned in 2012.

And following an approach to the Minister for Sport and Recreation by the RTRA, funding has been provided to create an 'interim' trail at Gngalara – principally to ensure that the users of this area aren't displaced to Pinjar before the necessary infrastructure is in place.

All of these projects are setting us up well for when (note, not 'if') the government commits the funding for the State Trail Bike Strategy.

Member Services

One of the challenges facing the RTRA in growing our membership base is that most of our objectives are long term, and many of our most important activities are not only behind-the-scenes but also quite sensitive in their dealings with government agencies and politicians.

This means that we can't provide the same level of 'instant gratification' that people get when they join a health club, a social club or an event-based organisation.

While we would hope that our members recognise this and support our longer term objectives, we do recognize the need to provide members with some more tangible benefits if we are to grow our member base beyond the core of 'true believers'.

This is not yet an area where we can claim consistent success. In previous years the RTRA acted as a catalyst for events such as the re-invigorated Capel Trail Bike rally and the RTRA / T&E Family Fun Weekends. More recently we have not had the resources available to create and support such

events, however with a new Events SubCommittee being formed we can expect to see more activity in this area in 2012.

The RTRA Web Site and eNewsletter continue to keep riders up to date with the activities of the Association, and also with useful information and news of other influences that affect trail bike riding in WA. These communications tools are often leveraged by reference in other online forums. The eNewsletter is published on a regular monthly cycle and to better cope with breaking news and RTRA is now also 'tweeting' on Twitter.

Riders' Rights – Confusion over what is and isn't legal led us to research and publish a simple reference guide. We will continue to add to this as new information comes to hand or if legislation or regulations change.

Ranger Reporting System – Since its inception we have received 90 reports of encounters with Rangers. This facility enables us to keep tabs on enforcement activities so that we can advise members, as well as to directly address issues where we suspect rangers or other authorities are targeting riders without just cause.

Education, Awareness and Attitude Shift

Changing attitudes is a long term goal. But if we are to create a sustainable future for trail bike riding we must be effective in encouraging riders to take a responsible attitude to the environment and other trails users, and helping non-riders to understand what it is that we do and why we are so passionate about it.

Our Minimal Impact Riding Program is progressing, albeit slowly. We are determined not to just cop out and produce a 'Dos and Don'ts' brochure. To achieve lasting behavioural change we need to create a change in *attitudes* – and that is not a simple task or one that can be achieved quickly.

So we are targeting influential riders and drip-feeding minimal impact messages into the riding community – and relying on the influence of responsible RTRA members to nudge their riding buddies from time to time.

The Committee

In 2011 we again had a stable Committee, having welcomed Brett Grandin to the Committee at the 2010 AGM.

The Committee members are all standing for re-nomination this year, with the exception of Damon Neaves who is unable to continue due to mounting work pressures. We thank Damon for his contribution over the past few years.

The RTRA would not be able to operate without the input and enthusiasm of the Committee. On behalf of all members, and from my personal perspective, I thank you all for your contribution.

Key Challenges for the next 12 months

There are dozens of challenges for us in the next 12 months – the key ones are:

- Working with the State Government to implement the recommendations from the State Trail Bike Strategy and ensure that the Strategy is adopted, that funding is provided and that the strategy is not watered down or the recommendations bastardised for political expediency
- Driving behavioural change amongst those trail bike riders who act in a way that damages the reputation of trail bike riders and the activity
- Getting the backing and involvement of manufacturers and retailers
- Continuing to improve the current off-road vehicle areas and lobbying for the development of one to service the southern suburbs
- Develop a Volunteer Management program that will harness and utilise the skills of our members
- Continue to increase our membership base

I would like to close by thanking all those members who have supported the Association by contributing to surveys and petitions, attending public meetings and workshops, contributing time to our initiatives and generally spreading the word to other riders about the work of the Association. Thank you all.

In no other State of Australia is there a rider group so connected, respected and effective. The next 12 months looks set to be the most exciting yet for your Association.