



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

26 October 2016

Dear Member

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

The past year has seen some of our groundwork over the past years translate into projects of significant opportunity. I speak in particular of Metro Road and Manjimup which are both progressing, albeit slowly, towards realisation.

This is exciting and rewarding, but the year has not been without its frustrations.

So what have we achieved over the past 12 months?

Advocacy

The 2015 Perth Motorcycle Show - held the week after our last AGM – was our most successful ever. Over the three days of the show we spoke to hundreds of riders of all ages, handed out over a thousand items of information about where to ride and the activities of the RTRA, and signed up dozens of new members to add weight to our lobbying voice.

Also in October was the State Outdoor Recreation and Trails Conference. As part of our program of educating government land managers and other trails users about what recreational trail bike riding is all about, we negotiated to include a ten minute segment into the rotating video display. Our video showed riders enjoying single trail and old logging tracks in the south west - and would have changed the perception of some of the conference attendees who typically just have images of motocross racing whenever trail bikes are mentioned!

In December we met with the Minister for Local Government, Tony Simpson to discuss our frustrations with the lack of progress with trail bike initiatives. Despite repeated assurances by the Minister and several more interactions throughout the year we were unable to achieve any significant breakthroughs in this regard. Our hope is that the new Minister, Paul Miles, will be more proactive. We are currently awaiting confirmation of an introductory meeting, although Paul is familiar with the work of the RTRA as the Pinjar Motorcycle Area is within his electorate.

In March we met with the Federal Senator, Ricky Muir, and were delighted to hear his pro-trail bike stance. We subsequently provided Senator Muir with a briefing on what we have been able to achieve in WA, resulting in some very positive references in his speech to Federal Parliament where he referred to Western Australia leading the way and being a model for other states to follow.

We also got wind of problems with Murchison Offroad Adventures, and provided advice and assistance to the Lane family who were struggling to deal with the state government bureaucracy.

In April we commenced our campaign to extract some leverage from the forthcoming State election. It's an opportunity that only comes around once every four years so we need to make the most of it. We have now met with nine MPs and Ministers, with more meetings scheduled. We will be advising members later this year of the action you can take to support this campaign.



In May we made a submission to the Perth-Peel Green Growth Plan to preserve the trees at Pinjar – both to retain the attractiveness of this popular recreation facility and to retain an important habitat for the Carnaby Cockatoo. I would like to thank our Committee Member, Xander Kabat (who just happens to have a PhD in Zoology) for preparing a very well reasoned and articulate submission.

We prepared another submission for the Perth-Peel Green Growth Plan; this time targeting the Kwinana area with the suggestion that rather than rehabilitate the bushland around the Medina Off Road Vehicle Area, there should be a land swap done to enable the expansion of the Off Road Vehicle Area.

In June we responded to reports about riders being stopped and questioned, warned and / or fined by Rangers. Most of the occurrences were near The Lakes / Flynn Road / Gorrie Road, although there were also some unsubstantiated reports from near Metro Road. We followed up with Parks & Wildlife and the Water Corporation and both agencies denied running any enforcement actions at Metro Road. Water Corporation confirmed the recent presence at Flynn Road, mainly in the area of Water Corp-owned land and we duly passed this warning on to members.

In July we were admitted as full members of the WA Sports Federation, confirming our status as the peak body for recreational trail bike riding. I attended the Council meeting and had the opportunity to tackle the Minister for Water on the issue of recreational restrictions in water catchment areas. We will be following up on this when we meet with the Minister later this month.

In August we represented trail bike riders in the consultation and workshops for the new State Trails Blueprint. The RTRA succeeded in getting motorised trails included in the last five-year trails strategy, and that recognition helped open up Lotterywest Trails grants for trail bike projects. So it was important that we maintain momentum and ensure that the next iteration of this Strategy also endorses trail bikes amongst the range of legitimate forest and trails users

As you can see it's been a busy year on the advocacy front, and as always, the RTRA is punching above its weight in terms of the resources available to us.

But it has been, in many ways, a frustrating year. The Minister for Local Government, Tony Simpson, proved to be a big disappointment. With the opportunity to move the trail bike agenda forward – something he has promised to do as far back as 2011 – he achieved absolutely nothing in his time in the role. He wouldn't even approve the small cost of printing stickers to update the So Where Can I Ride booklets after his Department increased the cost of registration. He refused to release any funding to Off Road Vehicle projects from the account that was set up for that purpose and which every person who registers an Off Road Vehicle contributes to.

Most of the time we felt that we were the only ones with any interest in addressing the issues and we were battling the bureaucratic apathy of his Department and the weakness of the Minister.

The final insult came recently when the new Off Road Vehicle Advisory Committee was formed – with neither RTRA or MWA represented and what appears to be a committee stacked with four wheel drive interests. Needless to say we have written to the *new* Minister with our grievance over this issue and we will certainly not be taking this lying down.

Next year we will have the review of Policy 13 – the Department of Water's policy governing recreation in water catchment areas. Given that the CEO of the Water Corporation has said that they no longer rely on runoff for our drinking water, we believe that this will be our best opportunity yet to make some real changes that could see catchment areas properly managed for recreation – including trail bikes – instead of the head-in-the-sand and ineffective exclusion policy that currently exists.



But we have a more immediate – and more serious – challenge. The Road Traffic Amendment (Impounding and Confiscation of Vehicles) Bill had its second reading in Parliament yesterday. And it's a shocker.

The new Bill provides that police can permanently confiscate any unregistered motorcycle caught – *or reasonably suspected* – riding on any road. This is a horrendous piece of legislation that appear to replace the onus of proof with a police officer 'reasonably suspecting' an offence.

While the RTRA is not against penalising people who recklessly ride unregistered motorcycles in suburban areas, the fact that this law applies to any road – or in fact anywhere the Road Traffic Act applies – means that it could be seriously abused if, for example, police were to mount a blitz on an unofficial area such as Metro Road. In a worst case scenario, all your kids could lose their bikes immediately and permanently.

We will obtain legal advice on this legislation and will advise members shortly. We have an opportunity to seek amendments prior to the third reading, or in the Upper House, but we will need to move quickly.

Trails and Riding Areas

Moving on to riding areas, there has been some recent action in an otherwise quiet year:

Pinjar

The Pinjar Motorcycle Area is going gangbusters! The car park, especially on the eastern or 'Family' side is usually full on weekends and the comments from riders and parents – are extremely positive.

The PeeWee trail is standing up to the high traffic counts exceptionally well, and I would like to thank all the parents who supervise this area so well, ensuring that the track doesn't get damaged by large bikes or quads abusing it.

DPaW will be finishing the signage shelters soon (we think!), and these will have more information for people new to the area.

Our Pinjar Maintenance Mornings were generally successful this year, although the most recent one was a disappointment, perhaps because of the weather. We need to formalise a Friends of Pinjar Group so that we can put together a roster of volunteers. DPaW are very keen for us to have some form of 'trail ambassadors' on duty to provide advice and assistance, and we have tinkered with the idea but haven't yet cracked it. If you have an interest in Pinjar and would be willing to play a role in this please see Keith Farnham or myself.

The expansion of the area has been put on hold for now, as it appears that Motorsports WA (the company that was trying to takeover the raceway) has gone under. This has removed the threat of an expanded Barbagallo Raceway robbing us of the southern section of the Motorcycle Area.

Our next major works item is the toilets. With so many visitors now enjoying this facility, toilets are now more of a necessity than a luxury.

We also still have a fight on our hands to prevent the logging of the remaining areas. This would have a tragic impact on the visual amenity of the area, a practical impact on the shade in the hotter months, and a safety impact as the natural vegetation that regrows in cleared areas does not provide the same sight lines as the pine plantations do.

The toilets is an ongoing conversation with DPaW, and we will be taking up the matter of the trees with the Minister for Forestry when we meet later this month.



Pinjar is our proof that the concept of free, permanently open, public areas can work. I'd like to thank everyone who uses the area responsibly and especially those people who take an active role in caring for the area. And we would like to take this opportunity to publicly recognise the ongoing commitment from DPaW - both financially and operationally. Without this great partnership we would not have gotten very far at all. A successful Pinjar makes it a whole lot easier to get more such areas.

Gnangara

The upgrade of Gnangara Road has made the entry and exit a lot safer, and a short term bonus is a limestone-sealed parking area.

DPaW has commissioned a redevelopment plan for the area and they are keen to start work on some improvements before the end of the year.

While we welcome improvements to Gnangara we would not want to see the budget for Pinjar curtailed. There is much more that can be achieved at Pinjar and we would rather see one excellent area than two mediocre ones so close together.

Metro Road

At last year's AGM we announced that DPaW had provided seed funding for the development of a Master Plan for Metro Road. DSR then threw their weight behind the project to fund the Master planning stage.

A steering committee was formed, with the RTRA represented by Committee member, Brett Grandin. We have been working through the DPaW Trails Development Framework which is the new standardised process for walk, cycle, horse and trail bike trails development on DPaW-managed land.

It's been a bit of a learning curve, as the process is ... *comprehensive*. The RTRA is currently awaiting finalisation of the Framework and the Master Plan, but meanwhile we have been on-site mapping potential trails to include in a sanctioned inventory.

The process may be slower than we would like, but the prize is a good one so we need to be patient and work it all through with DPaW.

Kwinana

The continuing lack of interest shown by the Town of Kwinana has resulted in no improvements to this area over the past twelve months. Investigations into a replacement site south of the river are continuing.

We have recently met with all local MPs in the area, and we now have some support from within the City of Kwinana. We're holding off on a public meeting in order to get the timing right so we can extract as much leverage as possible from the upcoming election.

Serpentine-Jarrahdale

The area we had identified last year was rejected by DPaW, however a new potential area closer to Jarrahdale itself has been identified and will be discussed by Council within the next month or so.

Earlier this year we were approached to participate in a project, initiated by the Shire Ranger, to identify an area within the Serpentine-Jarrahdale Shire. A relatively small parcel of land has been identified as suitable for a venue that is larger than York but smaller than Pinjar. The good news is that the S-J Shire is now supportive of this and negotiations with DPaW are continuing.



Carnarvon & Karratha

We have been contacted by the Shire of Carnarvon to discuss options for developing their small Off Road Vehicle Area, and the City of Karratha is currently looking at an interim development while they wait for approvals of their submission to expand the Millars Road Off Road Vehicle area.

Manjimup

This time last year I reported that Manjimup Council had allocated funding for the first stage of a Master Plan, and we were currently negotiating with the Department of Local Government for the balance of the funding needed. As I mentioned before, the Department of Local Government refused to provide any funding for this, but fortunately the Department of Sport and Recreation stepped in to enable the feasibility study to progress.

Many of you will know about this project and may even have completed the rider survey (which had over 2,200 responses!). For those who are not familiar with it, Manjimup Shire are considering becoming the first ever trail bike focused Trails Hub in Australia.

This is an incredibly exciting opportunity and it is progressing well. The RTRA was fortunate to be able to call on the expertise and extensive local knowledge of Committee member, Collin Jennings, who represented the RTRA on the Steering Committee.

There was a presentation to Council last week and the Feasibility Report is scheduled to be delivered to council in a couple of weeks.

As it has not yet been released I can't say much more at this stage, but the report will be out for public comment later this year and we'll notify members so you can read it and provide your views.

Commercial Ride Parks

While our focus has been on creating more free, public areas in or close to the metropolitan area, the RTRA also acknowledges and supports the efforts of Western Australia's commercial ride park operators, West Coast Trail Bike Park, West MotoPark, the Duck's Nuts and Dirt Riders' Heaven.

These operators provide facilities such as camping and a level of track maintenance that could never be possible on public land. And they do so with private funding and an enormous amount of personal effort.

The RTRA encourages members to support these facilities.

Public Trails

Western Australia has a huge inventory of public trails that are open and available to registered bikes and licensed riders. We are committed to preserving our access to these trails by vigorously defending any attempts to exclude motorised access and by educating riders on minimal impact techniques to better protect the trails and the surrounding environment.

Membership

As of today we reach nearly 1,500 families, representing around 2,500 riders.

While this is a useful number we have a long, long way to go. We are still only talking to a small proportion of the estimated 50,000 trail and quad bikes in Western Australia, so we're actually working on behalf of many times the number of members we have.

The number of members on our database who are currently financial has increased by 5.5% since this time last year. While this is a positive sign there is still a long way to go and we could use the



additional revenue that financial membership brings.

Our retailer support program has stalled due to lack of resources and the focus on advocacy and area projects this year. Getting some momentum in the southern suburbs should help boost membership numbers.

I would encourage all members to spread the word and encourage your riding mates to join up. The membership revenue is important, but the number of members is even more so.

Member Communications

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.

Our Facebook page at www.rtra.asn.au/facebook now has over 4,600 'Likes' (up 35% on last year), ranking it ahead of the Munda Bidli (3,200) and WAMBA (3,230) pages. We will continue to develop this page, but will always give advanced notice to financial RTRA members!

The dedicated Pinjar Motorcycle Area Facebook page has over 3,400 'Likes'

Education, Awareness and Attitude Shift

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.

We also need to help non-riders understand what it is that we do and why we are so passionate about it.

Our Minimal Impact Riding Program has been drip-feeding positive messages to help riders understand how they can protect the environment without spoiling their fun. Following an environment survey and focus group we have sharpened the focus of this program to target ride leaders on the basis that it is the leader of the ride who makes the decisions about which routes to take. With all the other activity going on this project has had to take a back seat but our aim is to have the program fully developed, piloted and ready to roll out prior to next winter.

We have continued the marketing of our 'So Where Can I Ride' booklet to local councils. The booklets have been very well received, and many councils are now placing repeat orders. Our next objective is to get these booklets placed at Department of Transport Licensing Centres.

In late June we collaborated with Tam and Xander at Overlander Adventure Equipment to run a 'So Where Can I Ride' seminar to highlight some of the constraints such as water catchment disease risk areas in the Perth hills.



The Committee

As I said at the beginning, this has been a positive year on many fronts, but frustrating as well. There is always so much more that we want to do but simply don't have the resources to complete.

The fact that we can accomplish what we do is in no small measure the result of our incredibly supportive Committee.

This year we welcomed Collin Jennings, Marty Brausch, Keith Farnham, Paul Prince and Xander Kabat to the committee. They joined our Treasurer, Henry van Es, Secretary, Valerie Pretzel, Angel Uruchima, Stacey Pike, Brett Grandin, Peter Otley and Paul Neve. Unfortunately Stacey and Marty had to resign early in the year due to Stacey's work pressures and we thank Stacey for her contribution during her time on the Committee. I'm delighted to announce that all but Paul Prince have renominated for 2017. Thanks Paul for your service to the RTRA this past year.

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

As always there are lots of challenges ahead. Here are the ones that I believe are the most significant:

- Secure amendments to the Road Traffic Confiscation Amendments to protect riders and their families from potential abuse of this legislation
- In partnership with other recreation stakeholders, achieve positive change to Policy 13 on Water Catchment through the review process
- Support the Manjimup Trails Hub project to improve its prospects of success
- Save the Pinjar trees and get the toilets project underway.
- Gain political mileage and secure some valuable promises ahead of the March election
- Complete the Master Planning for the Metro Road Regional Trail bike precinct
- Secure a commitment to develop a Pinjar style family-friendly facility south of the river
- Complete and implement the Minimal Impact / Ride Leaders Program
- Engage productively with the new Minister for Local Government
- Continue to attract new members and increase our proportion of renewals.
- Get a precedent project with access to funding from both Lottery West trails grants and the Off Road Vehicles Account.

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

Your association is recognised and highly regarded for the work that we do on behalf of recreational trail and quad bike riders. We have are continuing to open new doors and we look forward to another productive year in 2017.