

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

13 October 2010

Dear Member

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

After just over three years in operation the RTRA is really starting to build some momentum.

We are now starting to capitalise on all of the ground work we have put into developing strong working relationships with key government agencies such as DEC, DSR and DoT.

We are extending our reach by being invited to participate on working groups with other trails groups like bushwalkers and mountain bikes.

We can see success in our program to have responsible trail bike riding recognised as a legitimate recreational activity.

And most importantly, we are seeing this effort translate into improved facilities on the ground, most notably with the Pinjar program which has tremendous potential not only for that area but as a model for future public family motorcycle areas.

Before covering the Association's specific achievements, 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.

All of these objectives head towards the concept of recreational trail bike riding as a sustainable activity.

Embedded within these objectives is the need to change both the way trail bike riders are perceived by the non-riding community and 'the authorities', and the way we as riders and the industry respect the environment, our fellow trails users and our neighbours.

So what have we achieved over the past 12 months?

Membership

We attracted 112 new family members over the past 12 months. Currently we have 964 family memberships, representing close to 2,000 riders.

This is slightly down on the number we reported last year, but we have undertaken a cleanout of our membership list and now exclude the people who signed up for free when the RTRA first started and who did not subsequently renew their membership when it came time to pay the \$25 annual membership. This means that the RTRA membership we now report is more current and more committed.

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.

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

Political Recognition

This is the main reason why RTRA was established – to be able to say to the government “There are a lot more trail bike riders out there than you think – and it’s about time our needs were heard”.

Key achievements:

- We continued our program of meeting with Government MPs and Ministers to continue momentum for the State Trail Bike Strategy and to discuss issues and opportunities of local concern
- Furthered the campaign to bring trail bikes into the overall trails community via presentations at State Trails Conference and Department of Environment’s Annual Parks & Visitor Services Conference
- Drove the agenda from within the government’s Off Road Vehicle Advisory Committee
- Met with a number of Local Governments to brief them on trail bike needs and solutions
- Built on the successful campaign leveraging local council elections to convert the goodwill of councillors into support and action

Future Projects

- With the State Trail Bike Strategy and costings likely to be presented to Cabinet before the end of this year (yes I know we said that last year, too!) we are planning a lobbying campaign to ensure that the Strategy gets fully funded and is not watered down.
- We will continue to push for the full integration of trail bikes into the overall trails community so that trail bike riders are recognised as being legitimate users of trails, along with the other groups such as walkers and mountain bike riders.

- We will continue our dialogue with key Ministers and local MPs.
- Follow up and strengthening of relationships with Local Government executives and councilors.

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 RTRA turned the tide of Off Road Vehicle Area closures, and since then we have been building on this momentum.

Key achievements:

- Secured support from a wide range of stakeholders for the the State Trail Bike Strategy
- Met with Gingin Shire to understand current noise issues at Lancelin and propose win-win solutions.
- Submitted for - and won - two 'Recreating in Natural Areas' project grants from the DEC Environmental Sustainability Grant Fund. These are the Minimal Impact Riding Program and the Pilot Trail Bike Trail Project. Special mention here must be made of the initiative shown by Valerie Pretzel who identified the funds, connected the dots on how the RTRA could develop eligible projects, sought support from environmental groups and DEC and wrote the funding submissions.
- Followed through on the DEC funding for Pinjar to ensure that on-ground works would go ahead.
- Prepared a submission and participated in a hearing at the Parliamentary Enquiry into Recreation in Drinking Water Source Protection Areas
- Were invited to participate in the Hills Trails Reference Group - the first time trail bikes have ever been invited to work alongside non-motorised trails groups.
- Continued to lobby for Lotterywest Trails Grants to apply to motorised trail projects
- Were invited to present at the annual Rangers conference to bring Rangers up to date on the various initiatives RTRA is undertaking
- Provided trail bike representation on the new DEC *Motorised Off Road Vehicle Recreation Working Group*.

Future Projects

- Increase our efforts to get the State Trail Bike Strategy endorsed, adopted, funded and implemented.
- Build on the work at Pinjar to Identify and secure more ORV Areas (metro and regional) – to provide more options for riders of unregistered bikes (including under-aged and quad riders)
- Build on the Pilot Trail project to push for trails-based ORV opportunities – to expand the concept of an Off Road Vehicle area beyond the square patch of wasteland that

is the current paradigm and create opportunities for family-based trail riding on real trails.

- Assistance for potential commercial operators seeking development approvals.

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 need to provide members with some more tangible benefits if we are to grow our member base beyond the core of 'true believers'.

For this reason we are working to expand the number and range of member services, always keeping our main focus on the real objectives of the Association to ensure that wherever possible, member benefits also play a significant role in the pursuit of those objectives.

Key Achievements:

- Family Fun Weekends – Mornington and Quindanning. Although not involved in a 'hands-on' way as last year, RTRA supported the T&E Club's two 'Family Fun Weekends' as opportunities for family members to ride together in an organised but unstructured recreational event.
- Member-only West Coast Safari Rides – RTRA members enjoyed discounted rates and some of the best trail riding in Australia on the 1 Day (Intro) and 2 Day Margaret River ride.
- RTRA Web Site and eNewsletter – the RTRA web site was totally redeveloped and relaunched on January 1st 2010. The new web site contains a great deal of valuable information and also has made it easier for members to renew their memberships, update their details and stay up to date with projects.
- Ranger Reporting System – We continue to receive regular 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.
- Member Discounts - The cost of annual RTRA membership can now be recouped with the discounts provided by West Coast Trailbike Safaris (1 or 2 Day RTRA rides) and the 20% discount on Trailzone magazine subscriptions!

Future Projects:

- More member discounts will be added over the next 12 months
- RTRA will continue to support family-oriented riding events - we don't currently plan

to run any events in our own right but this is subject to review as opportunities arise.

- With more projects coming on stream there is greater opportunity for member involvement.

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.

We also need to better understand the issues from the point of view of other trails users and land managers. To this end RTRA has participated in seminars and projects related to water catchment and dieback issues in order to be able to transfer the knowledge gained to the riding community.

Key Achievements:

- Education Campaign - currently stalled with the Minister for Local Government, this campaign is intended to provide clarity about where the various types of bikes and quads can - and can't be ridden.
- Minimal Impact Riding Campaign - this is a major project that will identify behaviours that, if modified, could have a significant effect in reducing the impact of trail bike riding on the environment. It is a critical element of the campaign to make recreational trail bike riding a sustainable activity into the future.
- Media comments – RTRA is the voice that radio, TV and newspaper journalists turn to when there is a trail bike related issue.
- Representing trail bike riders at government and community forums - Helping decision-makers understand the distinctions between competitive and recreational riding, between circuit riding and trail bike touring and between different rider demographics – helping them to distinguish between trail riders and 'vandals on trail bikes'.
- Participation in the Southern Darling Region Recreation Strategy
- Participation in DEC review of effectiveness of Dieback control strategies
- Participation in online forums – gently introducing topics and comments to encourage riders to think about the actions that help and hinder our cause
- Responsible Riding messages incorporated into eNewsletters.
- Continue to dispel myths and mis-information about public liability
- Contributed to the review of the Motorcycle Riders' Learners Handbook and lobbied to have a section on off-road riding included.

Future Projects:

- Completion of Minimal Impact and Rider Education campaigns.
- Fully develop and manage the 'Friends of Pinjar' group and other volunteer activities.

The Committee

In 2010 our Committee remained stable. This continuity provided good governance and a streamlined management structure.

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 for your contribution.

Key Challenges for the next 12 months

There are several challenges for us in the next 12 months – they 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 the program to improve the current off-road vehicle areas and lobbying for the development of one to service the southern suburbs
- Pursuing the case for access to outer water catchment areas under reasonable conditions
- Continue to increase our membership base
- Successfully implement the Friends of Pinjar Group as a strategy to demonstrate that public Off Road Vehicle Areas can be managed successfully by user groups.

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 initiatives such as the minimal Impact Riding program, Friends of Pinjar group and Pilot Trail Bike Trail project 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. With momentum building, the next 12 months will be our most exciting yet!