

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

25 November 2009

Dear Member

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

RTRA started accepting public memberships just over two years ago, so by most standards our Association is still just a baby. But for such a young organisation I think we can pretty confidently state that we're punching well above our weight!

Our task is a big one.

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".

We're trying to get the agencies that make funding decisions about recreation and recreational facilities to understand that trail bike riding is every bit as legitimate an activity as walking, abseiling, spelunking, skate board riding and the dozens of other activities that are encouraged in the name of physical activity and social wellbeing.

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 is all going to take some time, and not everything is going to go our way. But with persistence, tenacity and 'controlled impatience' we can achieve things that might seem far-fetched today.

So in the context of a long journey we are now well on our way, and can not only see the distant horizon but we have our GPS locked in on it.

Along the way it is important that we celebrate all our small victories, because each one of them contributes to the overall objective and sustains our faith and our energy and our resolve to overcome the obstacles. And the more little victories we collect the stronger we become as the momentum builds.

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.

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

This time last year we had 807 family memberships, representing approximately 1,500 riders.

I'm pleased to report that as of today we now have 1,086 family memberships representing 1,909 riders.

This is a 34% increase and significantly strengthens both our communications reach and our lobbying power.

As was the case last year, not all of these members are fully financial, with 22.4% of the total riders represented yet to pay their annual renewal fee. It is felt that this is partly due to the current policy of relying on email as the sole communications medium, so a physical mail follow up is planned.

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.

For this reason we will be introducing a tiered system of memberships in 2010 that will help us to continue our membership growth.

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:

- Meetings with Minister for Local Government, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Chief of Staff for Environment and several Members of Parliament to brief them on the issues and seek their support.
- 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
- Played a significant role in re-energising the government's Off Road Vehicle Advisory Committee

- Met with a number of Local Governments to brief them on trail bike needs and solutions
- Successful campaign leveraging local council elections to secure the support of local councilors. I'd like to give a bit of background to this one:

This year we decided to use RTRA influence and the power of our member base to lobby potential councillors during the Local Government Elections. Local councils tell us they get plenty of complaints from residents about trail bikes, so it is important that we present the other side of the argument. The Local Government Elections provided a powerful way to get our message across, at a time when prospective councillors are most willing to listen.

We identified 13 Councils and Shires that contained 'hot-spot' locations or had the opportunity to create areas or facilities, and wrote to every candidate asking them to state their position on the needs of recreational trail bike riders. Our objective in this was simple: to raise the issue with Councillors at the Local Government level so that they are better informed when they make planning and funding decisions.

The campaign stirred up plenty of interest with most candidates in the local election responding - and a surprising number pledging support to include trail bikes in recreation and trails planning within their Shires. 33 of the 74 candidates who responded ended up winning seats in their respective electorates – again we wrote to all of them reminding them of their previous comments and offering RTRA assistance via briefings, presentations and the development of council submissions.

We have since had responses from 10 of the 13 targeted Shires requesting information, briefings or assistance. We will be progressively following these up.

With this project under our belt and the documented methodology, we will certainly run the same campaign across the state at the next state election.

### **Future Projects**

- With the State Trail Bike Strategy and costings likely to be presented to Cabinet before the end of this year we are anticipating a major lobbying campaign in the New Year 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 throughout 2009 we have been building on this momentum.

### Key achievements:

- The State Trail Bike Strategy has now been fully costed and will shortly be presented to Cabinet
- Monitored the actions of Gingin Shire and kept up the pressure in terms of maintenance of the access road.
- Developed a Federal funding proposal in conjunction with the Town of Kwinana and Department of Sport and Recreation to upgrade the Kwinana Off Road Vehicle Area. Unfortunately the funding was not allocated, however the proposal can be re-used against future funding opportunities.
- The Department of Environment and Conservation has now signed off on funding to significantly upgrade Gngangara and Pinjar Off Road Vehicle Areas, with works to commence in 2010.
- Intervened to ensure that plans to expand Wanneroo Raceway will not have a negative impact on the Pinjar Off Road Vehicle Area.
- Secured sympathetic media coverage for riders over the issue of vigilante groups setting traps in the Mundaring area, and met with the CEO of the Mundaring Shire over the issue. RTRA now has a positive working relationship with this key local authority.
- Participated as a stakeholder in the Department of Environment's Swan – Collie Land Use Planning Study to identify potential trails and areas for various user segments.
- Secured funding from DEC to complete the Pinjar Pilot trail.
- Assisted with a number of local area issues such as Ellenbrook, Myalup/Binningup, Nannup.

### Future Projects

- Water Source Protection Policy review – RTRA submission will be arguing for the opening up of access to some of the excellent hills areas that are currently off-limits.
- Identify and secure more ORV Areas (metro and regional) – to provide more options for riders of unregistered bikes (including under-aged and quad riders)
- 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
- Push to have trail bike trails qualify for funding under Lotterywest Trails Grants

## 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:

- Minikhana Event – In conjunction with the Trail and Enduro Club, RTRA contributed volunteers and promotion to run a successful Minikhana day at Harvey.
- Family Fun Weekends – Mornington and Quindanning. The success of the Harvey Minikhana led RTRA and T&E Club to collaborate on the development of 'Family Fun Weekends' – opportunities for family members to ride together in an organised but unstructured recreational event. The first event was for motorcycles only, and the Quindanning event introduced quad bikes in what is believed to be the first time that bikes and quads, kids and adults were able to ride together in an MWA sanctioned 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 ride held in November.
- Capel Trail Bike Rally – In 2008 RTRA took over the Capel 200 recreational trail ride from the Southern Capes Motorcycle Club. The re-branded and revitalized KTM Capel Trail Bike Rally was a great success, exceeding all our targets and delivering an excellent day's riding to the nearly 300 entrants – many of whom joined RTRA specifically for the event. The event was a major effort and many hundreds of volunteer hours were required to make it happen. In early 2009 an opportunity arose to hand over this event to the newly formed Ironstone Adventure Riding Club and after much consideration the Committee agreed that the interests of riders and the focus of the RTRA would best be served by 'gifting' the event to the new club. Ironstone subsequently ran two similar events in 2009, more than doubling the riding opportunities. While the decision to hand the event on meant that RTRA missed out on the income generated, the decision allowed us to focus on the 'main game' of our objectives without the major distraction that organizing an event like this entails.
- RTRA Web Site and eNewsletter – the RTRA web site and e-Newsletter 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 now published on a regular monthly cycle and to better cope with breaking news 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 over 50 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.

#### **Future Projects:**

- More Family Fun Weekends are planned in conjunction with the Trail and Enduro Club. We are confident that this concept will continue to grow in 2010.
- Our major project is the complete redevelopment of the RTRA web site and email management system. This will give us a platform from which we can introduce a range of member service improvements and initiatives, such as :
  - Tiered membership with associated privileges
  - Group offers – eg insurance, discounts
  - Forums and feedback
  - RSS feeds of items of specific interest to members
  - Increased member participation in projects
  - Easier member sign-up and renewal

The new web site should be live by the end of this year and will be progressively expanded throughout 2010.

## **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:**

- Media comments – RTRA is the voice that radio, TV and newspaper journalists turn to when there is a trail bike related issue. Prior to RTRA there was no one to put across the riders' views.
- Events – Northam Motorcycle Show, Tumbulgum MX, Perth Motorcycle Show. RTRA committee members manned a stand at each of these events, providing information about the RTRA and trail bike issues to visitors.

- 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’. This year we have presented at:
  - Joint Agency Implementation Committee
  - WA Trails Seminar
  - DEC Parks and Visitor Services Annual Conference
  - Off Road Vehicle Advisory Committee
  - Peel Region Seminar on State Trail Bike Strategy
  - Ellenbrook Community Consultation meeting
- 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.
- Lobbied via the Government’s off-road vehicle committee to have an education strategy developed.
- Continue to dispel myths and mis-information about public liability

**Future Projects:**

- Multi-media education campaign through Department of Local Government (in progress)

## **The Committee**

In 2009 we had some changes to our Committee. Jeremy Connor resigned to focus his attention on the Ironstone Adventure Riding Club and Fiona Parker resigned due to work pressures. I would like to record my thanks to them both for their contribution.

We were pleased to welcome Simon Mykolajenko to the Committee, bringing many years of offroad riding, event organisation and industry experience to the Committee.

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 dozens of 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 to improve the current off-road vehicle areas and lobbying for the development of one to service the southern suburbs
- Arguing the case for access to outer water catchment areas under reasonable conditions
- Continue to offer recreational riding events in conjunction with clubs and commercial operators
- 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 initiatives such as the Family Fun days 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 will be pivotal, and I think tremendously exciting. To borrow a phrase from the original Dirt Bike Magazine: **Let's hit it WFO!**