

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2010

2010 has been a great year for Roads Australia. Our horizons expanded in every area. Membership reached record levels and our vision of a genuine partnership with policy makers – something the industry has never achieved before – began to take shape. To our delight, and the astonishment of some who began the journey seven years ago, Roads Australia has evolved into the national stakeholder body for Roads.

It is a good time to say goodbye. But there will be no pause in our success - David Stuart-Watt will now lead Roads Australia. He has the commitment and the leadership to build a new kind of industry partnership for Australia and I am sure that under his Presidency this will prosper.

It is worth noting some milestones which bring us to today.

Roads Australia began in 1952 as the Australian Road Federation and saw great days. But by 2002 we had dwindled to 11 major members – Boral, Caterpillar, Emoleum, Mobil, Pioneer Road Services, Queensland Main Roads, Readymix, Shell, The RTA, Transfield Services, and Transurban. I drew the straw as President.

We doubled the membership fees so we could appoint a full-time CEO. We found Ian Webb and gave him a strong incentive to succeed – our total income in 2002 was only \$197,000 and we had \$598 in reserves. I reassured him and found him a desk outside my office.

In October 2003, after a few drinks, we recorded in the minutes that the ARF was to become *“the recognised peak industry body for Australia's road sector”*.

But this was not as presumptuous as it sounds. Australia needed a body which could unite the industry and the stakeholders were keen for the opportunity to network. We began giving lunches and we soon discovered that the industry was more interested in who was coming than who was speaking.

An organization which derives its member satisfaction from its breadth of membership cannot grow slowly. So we gathered all the penguins and marched them up the beach. As they looked left and right, they saw other penguins. And, when they made it to the top of the cliff without breaking ranks, we had a national organization for roads in Australia.

The membership growth was remarkable. Between 2003 and 2004 the membership grew from 11 to 24. I reported in my President's report, “This result is at the upper end of the Board's planning expectations”. This became a regular theme. 2005 – 40 members, 2007 – 52 members and today 71 members.

We knew we had to cover the entire industry. We identified 11 industry sectors and we set out to recruit the key players in each. The list included motoring associations, unions, the freight sector and government agencies. RA is unique in embracing all of them.

Other milestones followed. As your President I was invited to serve on the World Board of the International Road Federation and David will succeed me. In 2007 we were awarded the IRF Global Achievement Award for Advocacy in recognition of the Roads Australia journey. I am delighted that the Chairman of IRF Geneva, Mr Kiran Kapila, is able to be with us at our Annual Lunch this year.

In 2007 we launched Roads Insider, a regular news roundup for the senior management of the industry. Under Mark Bowmer's management the subscriber base has grown from 400 to 3000. Roads Insider became an industry institution.

We ran events - thirty eight last year and in every Australian state. 2500 people registered on line direct to our database – a far cry from the excel spreadsheet I gave to Ian Webb in 2003. The RA website now ranks between four and six for “roads” in Australian Google. All this is managed by Rachael Rooney from a mountain in the Dandenongs. Congratulations, Rachael.

In 2008 we changed our name to Roads Australia and Minister Albanese officially launched RA as the national stakeholder body for roads.

But amidst the milestones, something else happened. Roads Australia evolved from an advocacy organization into a new kind of industry association. We were not there to confront the policy makers but to engage them in partnership.

This is typified by RA's policy chapters, each led by a Board Member. The chapters work directly with policy makers. Their initiatives have encouraged greater co-operation between our road agencies and changed entrenched institutions. Just two examples: The current harmonisation of pre-qualifications throughout Australia went through COAG and Austroads and was initiated in RA. Similarly, Australia's major road agencies now co-operate to provide the industry with advance notice of major projects – the RA website is the vehicle for this.

These initiatives are occurring in partnership with the policy makers. The heads of three of Australia's road agencies are actually members of the RA board. We are on the same side of the table at last. This is a unique model for an industry association. To my knowledge there is nothing else like it.

Our road agencies are to be congratulated for seeing that the future lies in engaging the stakeholders in a common purpose. Gone are the days when an effective public servant stands between the minister and the industry.

It may surprise you to know that RA has only two full-time staff – the Chief Executive and his PA. They are backed up by a part-time Communications Director, a Board Policy Adviser and an events Manager, all of whom access the database from home. On your behalf I wish to acknowledge their contribution.

Essential to this success story has been our CEO Ian Webb. I remember when David Stewart Watt and I recommended to the Board that we appoint Ian as our full time CEO. The response was “...but he has no experience in transport?” “Precisely, we can give him that, but he will bring all the other skills we need”, I replied. What a success story that appointment has been.

RA has thirteen Board members, the majority of whom are Chief Executives of companies which are household names. They give enormously in pursuing our ambitious vision for a new kind of industry association. I particularly wish to acknowledge the heads of our Policy Chapters, David Stuart-Watt, Tim Boyle, Peter Walton and Alan Tesch, together with the Board’s policy adviser Neil Doyle.

The 2010 John Shaw medalist was Arvo Tinni. Congratulations Arvo.

We have also received great support from Ministers over the last seven years. Two deserve special mention for their exceptional understanding of the RA vision – Tim Pallas and Craig Wallace.

Finally I wish to thank our members for their commitment. This year our events were sponsored by Abigroup, AECOM, ARRB Group, Aquenta Consulting, Aurecon, Clayton Utz, ConnectEast, DTEI, Fulton Hogan, Hyder, John Holland, Komatsu, Leighton, Linking Melbourne Authority, Macmahon, McConnell Dowell, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Pitt&Sherry, Queensland Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Motorways, RTA NSW, The Shell Company of Australia, Sinclair Knight Merz, Thiess, Transurban and VicRoads.

Looking back over my term as President I particularly wish to thank the faithful few who were there at the beginning, and especially Queensland Transport and Main Roads. SKM and Abigroup deserve special mention since they were respectively the first consultants and contractors to commit to RA.

As your President I have been privileged to see Roads Australia move from the drawing board to reality. The transition has been extraordinary. But our gladness does not lie merely in the roll call and full house lunches. It is generated for me by what this remarkable institution, Roads Australia, is able to achieve for the industry, for our most important national asset and for the Australian community.

The real excitement therefore lies ahead of you. And you have the silver shovel.

Go well Roads Australia.

Ray Fisher, President, 1 December 2010