

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main headline is that we are able to report another healthy surplus for 2014. You will have seen our annual report that was published in March this year outlining this, and I am going to leave Derek to review this and the explanation of the details behind it; he is going to address you shortly.

There are a number of other positive achievements during 2014 that I would like to run through:

1. Our membership continues to grow. We now have over 7,800 members, with more joining at a rate of 76 per month so far this year. The reported increase in the 2014 Annual Report was understated as the implementation of the new membership database enabled us to expunge over 200 duplicate records.
2. Range use at Bisley by both members and corporate users continues to grow. Our revenue from range hire in 2014 was up 9% versus the year before, and we have continued to see this type of growth continue into this year. This is not obvious from the Annual Report as the more observant of you may have noted, since note 4 in our accounts headed Charitable Shooting Activity suggests otherwise. This is predominantly because 1) we did not hold an "Open Day" in 2014 and 2) we have been extremely cautious, on the advice of our Auditors, about how we categorise certain types of target hire by members; this is now captured mainly within "commercial trading operations".

Whilst on the subject of Charitable Shooting Activity, it is perhaps worthwhile mentioning that the decision by the Charity Commission to refuse the registration of the Cambridge Target Shooting Association as a charity at the end of last year is not a change in the Charity Commission's position; the rationale presented actually reiterates that target shooting can be charitable if pursued for the object of the advancement of education, particularly for the young, or if the organisation promoting target shooting can demonstrate connectivity between their shooting and defence of the realm.

The NRA's stated objects and our activities are fully aligned in serving these twin public benefits through our assistance to those who are linked to the armed forces and the police, and our promotion of shooting for the young, especially amongst cadets.

3. We have made considerable improvements to our ranges, by growing capacity with the refurbishment of Melville, Cheylesmore and Butt Zero, and improving infrastructure with new target frames on Century, a new road and better parking area around the back of the 600 yard firing point, and some better toilet blocks. There remains a lot to do, but it's a decent start.
4. We have recruited three new Trustees to bring us to a full complement of 12. We had a very thorough process during which encouragingly 14 people came forward to express an interest in being co-opted to Council, and 11 followed up with a full CV upon request. If the quality and strength of all of the candidates and their willingness to put their shoulder to the wheel is anything to go by, then I think the prospects for the NRA look promising. Organisations like ours can only thrive if people volunteer their time and experience in meaningful quantities. It was very encouraging that so many were prepared to do just that and each one deserves our thanks. After the difficult process of producing a shortlist for interview, we chose three - Alice Gran, who is here, David Lacey, at the back, and James Harris, who is also here - and all of them have already made a positive impact. Amongst other things, James will be chairing our Regional Ranges Working Group, and Alice and David have been bringing the investigations into the allegations of illegality and impropriety regarding Rule 150 to a conclusion. As both have extensive legal experience and are completely independent of the dispute, this seemed an appropriate way to progress this issue, and I'm sure we will say more about that later.

There are a number of priorities that we are focussing on in 2015. These are encapsulated in the three year plan that was published last Autumn, and are very much underway:

First, supporting regional shooting. We have recruited a Regional Ranges Manager who starts work on July 1st. His first order of business is to produce a “state of the nation” assessment by year end, which will become the background working document from which the Regional Ranges Working Group can develop a coherent strategy.

Second, improving our skills training. As you know, we offer probationary courses to new members in order to deliver safe shooters as part of our commitment to the Safe Shooting System. We’ve committed the new Wimbledon House to provide a base for our training team to help ensure we maintain high standards at Bisley and other ranges.

Third, encouraging youth shooting. As part of our efforts to sustain interest in our sport and grow our membership, we have implemented a programme whereby all those under 25 now enjoy a 40% discount when entering any NRA sponsored competition or training programme. We are increasing our support for the GB U19 Target Rifle team which travels to South Africa each Spring and we are supporting a GB U21 team to the World Championships in Camp Perry later in August as a complement to our strategy of making the first 3 years of NRA membership free to those under 21.

Fourth, continuing to improve Bisley ranges and capacity. Central to this is the planned installation of electronic targets on a couple of ranges, which we believe can change the nature of the shooting that we are able to make available. This will be very much a trial at first as there are real concerns to be understood about how these targets can and should be used, particularly with the volume of shooting that they can be expected to undergo.

Fifth, developing a firm financial base and cash flows for future developments. Our continuing goal of generating strong cash flows to plough back into shooting remains a core priority. The keen readers of our 2014 report will note that we have altered our reserves policy to incorporate an ongoing target cash balance. As I have mentioned before, the right level of ongoing surplus for an organisation like ours continues to be a subject of debate, but I remain comfortable for now that it is both fair to current and future members of this organisation that current member activity breaks even, and income from commercial activity is either being invested or banked. Our plans could generate a substantial sum over the next 5-10 years, and later on Andrew Mercer will introduce the concept of the Bisley Master plan, so that we can prioritise how and how much we should spend on this, our greatest asset.

Sixth, improving services for members. While keeping the rise in membership fees and many other charges to no more than RPI, many of you will already be aware of the improved insurance coverage we have negotiated on members’ behalf. Legal expenses and property coverage has been doubled, and personal accident limits significantly improved and extended. Improvements have also been made to club coverage.

The positive achievements of 2014 and the ongoing execution of the priorities for 2015 are a very full agenda. I am sure that you will appreciate that none of these things just happen on their own. I would like to pay a very big thank you to both Andrew Mercer and his staff, and my fellow Trustees, all of whom have worked with considerable professionalism, and not a little enthusiasm, to create the positive momentum I believe we are now enjoying.

With all these improvements and other things that are going on, nevertheless we cannot lose sight of the fact that future challenges remain.

There is continued pressure on Bisley and regional ranges as the former mops up the increasing lack of capacity available at the latter. As regional range access becomes more difficult, the aggregate number of range days available in any given period across the country is likely falling, while demand for more range time from a growing membership is almost certainly rising. To sort out this dilemma, we need to increase capacity, and use it more effectively.

We also need to engender more mutual respect and support between our many different types of shooting. The NRA controls seven different disciplines, while recognising or acknowledging over a dozen more. It is in all our interests to do this; we all know that we have enough detractors outside the wider shooting community without turning on each other. I have oft repeated the remarks of a predecessor in this post, and have no hesitation in doing so again; "if the shooting sports do not hang together, they will hang separately." Wise words which are still true today, and of which we must remain fully cognisant.

Part of this is to be mindful of the need for collective vigilance and partnership with the police to guard against those who would endanger our security. The radicalisation by terrorist groups of those living in this country should warn us that such a person could be living next door. Personal firearm ownership comes with responsibilities which we must constantly live up to.

If we do so, and do so successfully, I am convinced that we have a strong story to tell. The promotion of the sport of target shooting has many positive elements to lean on, from it being a truly open sport with different genders, ages and physical abilities competing side by side, to the medal success enjoyed at last year's Commonwealth Games, all the while fostering the public benefit that I mentioned previously. Few, if any, other sports can claim the same.