

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
held in the NRA Pavilion, Bisley on Friday 14th 2013 at 17.30

Present:

Chairman	Dr R. Pizer
Vice Chairman of the Council	Mr J Webster
Treasurer	Mr D Lowe
Chief Executive	Mr A Mercer
Members	71 Registered Members

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PROCEEDINGS

Attached hereto and initialled by the Chairman of the meeting as a record of the meeting.

ORDINARY RESOLUTIONS

a. **Election of Officers.**

- (1) **Re-election of the President.** The Chairman proposed on behalf of The Council that H.R.H. the Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB, AK, QSD, CD, PC, ADC(P) be re-elected as President.

The Resolution was approved.

- (2) **Election of Vice-Presidents.** The Chairman proposed on behalf of The Council that the existing Vice-Presidents, excluding General de Chastelain of Canada at his request, be elected en bloc.

The Resolution was approved.

- b. **Appointment of the Auditors.** The Chairman proposed on behalf of the Council the appointment of Saffery Champness, Chartered Accountants, as Auditors.

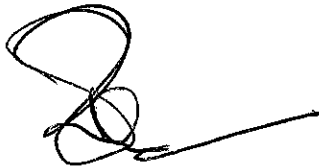
The Resolution was approved.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2012

The Statement of the Chairman, the Report of the Trustees and the Audited Accounts were received.

CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH AND OPEN FORUM.

Attached at Annex.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chairman

Annual General Meeting – 14th June 2013

Proceedings

Chairman

I welcome you to the AGM of the NRA for 2013.

I will start by introducing the people on the platform with me. There's Derek Lowe, our new Treasurer, Andrew Mercer, our new Chief Executive, John Webster, new Vice Chairman of Council and myself, Robin Pizer, Chairman of Council.

Following the agenda, I have great pleasure proposing on behalf of the Council, the election of the President, H.R.H. The Prince of Wales be re-elected. Can I have a show of hands in favour, and against. That's unanimous.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY.

We now come to the election of Vice Presidents. I need to just tell you that General de Chastelain of Canada has requested that he should not be re-elected, so you will see the list of Vice Presidents on the back of your agenda paper, again on behalf the Council, I have great pleasure in proposing that the existing Vice Presidents as listed on the rear of the notice be re-elected en-bloc.

Can I have a show of hands in favour, and against. Again, unanimous. Thank you.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY.

Then there is the election of the Auditors. Again, I propose that Saffrey Champness be reappointed. I propose that on behalf of the Council, so can I have a show of hands in favour of that please?

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY.

Chairman:

I now come to the statement that I would like to make, and this year we are trying something different, in that my statement to you will be shorter, and followed by a statement from our new treasurer, Derek Lowe, and a third statement from our new Chief Executive, Andrew Mercer, who will give his first impressions of the NRA and some of the opportunities open to us.

I would ask that you keep your questions until you have heard all three statements.

I had hoped that in 2012 we would break even but this was not to be and as you can see on page 13 of the accounts we sustained a loss of £65,204. We had budgeted for a loss of £96,000 and had hoped to reduce this by finding additional savings during 2012. There is just one other number in the accounts that I will draw to your attention that is in Note 7 on page 22 where the professional fees are shown at £425,619. The bulk of this consists of one-off costs. The total breaks down to £186K for finance work, £160K for legal advice regarding restructuring, litigation and tribunals, and £80K for "routine" legal & professional fees. I would particularly like to thank Mark Thackstone for the work he has done on our financial systems, continuing into 2013. He leaves us this month.

I will leave more detailed comments to Derek Lowe.

There are still areas where problems are being uncovered and I would particularly like to thank Richard Bailie who became a trustee last September for reviewing our leases and identifying areas where rent reviews had not occurred and other obligations had not been fulfilled. He has been spending one day a week on this for many months but at the end we will have an up to date schedule of rents and obligations possibly for the first time in 10 years. So far 39 rent reviews have been completed.

This takes me on to another important issue for the long term future of the NRA. It is clear that Council, General Council and the membership at large must continually evaluate the spread of skills amongst the trustees, using the best talents available from our whole membership. This is to ensure that we continue to give the right support and direction to the organisation and its Chief Executive at various and different times. As such we should review how we go about selecting, appointing and assessing trustees to ensure that we continue to progress and meet the opportunities and challenges of the future. A key objective is to ensure that General Council knows about the value of a particular skill set or individual to the NRA, so that they can form an understanding of how well trustees, and future candidates for the role, are contributing. We plan to engage with General Council to increase their appreciation of the skills and value being provided.

In February I asked General Council how well the NRA was doing when measured against the Charity Commission's hallmarks of a successful charity using a scale of good, needs to do better and bad. The response we got did not surprise me but showed that we have to do a lot better before we can say we have got the governance right. The Council will be seeking to improve these ratings in the coming year.

I am aware that a petition is to be presented later about the costs of the Imperial Meeting, so it might be sensible to say what studies the Council has put in train. But first a few facts, it may be uncomfortable but Target Rifle has become an expensive sport and TR clubs everywhere have seen huge reductions of up to 50% or more in numbers shooting TR in the last 30 years. We are just not recruiting enough youngsters to replace the older shooters who give up. As a one off decision for 2013, we have decided to change the late entry surcharge. For on line entries the 10% surcharge will not apply to entries made before 1 July. For paper based entries the late entry surcharge of 10% will remain from 1 June. The surcharge for online and paper based entries from 1 July will be 10% only, instead of 25%. The Council will carry out a review and survey this Autumn to establish more clearly what possible cost-reducing options the majority would like to see. One crucial exercise will be to try to establish accurate costs of running the Imperial Meeting including permanent staff costs and overheads. The last study of this nature in 2005 suggested the Imperial Meeting was running at a large loss. We will look at ways to reduce those costs but it will be very difficult to justify any subsidy to the Imperial Meeting or any other meeting. We are carrying out similar cost studies into other flagship events run by the NRA.

Council and General Council encourage the fullest constructive participation in the survey. We all as members should look forward with interest to the results of the exercise and be prepared to live with some uncomfortable truths. The issue of affordability is a pressing one in most areas of life at the moment, so it is entirely valid for it to be raised and kept under review. We believe that seeking the mind of a broad range of TR constituencies will be instructive as the issues are addressed.

Lastly I would like to congratulate Nigel Penn and his team on a very successful tour of the West Indies, in which the Australia Match was won by a margin of 43 points. This is tinged with sadness that David Hossack did not live to see this splendid result, as he was such a strong supporter of West Indies shooting and the GB team there.

I now hand over to Derek Lowe.

Treasurer:

Thank you Chairman.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as you may know, I have only recently taken on the position of Treasurer, so my comments consist inevitably of some first impressions.

I would like to thank General Council for their confidence expressed by electing me to this post, and also to the other members of Council for proposing me. My intention is to serve for three years and I do so in the same spirit exhibited by many NRA members in the service of shooting – running teams and clubs, training and coaching, keeping our ranges running & our clubhouses operating and so on. Along with all of Council and General Council, I am looking to the support of the wider membership as we seek to serve the interests of shooting as a whole.

I believe that 2012 will come to be seen as something of a transition year. The remaining effects of what precipitated the restructuring, and the process of the restructuring itself, will have been reflected in the 2012 accounts. Given certain provisions that have been taken, we do not anticipate substantial items relating to the restructuring to appear in future accounts.

As you will see from the Annual Report, while there was a loss in 2012 of £65k, it does represent improvement on both 2011 and the budget set for 2012. This improvement stands to the credit of all staff who have contributed to the broadest health of the NRA, whether out on the ranges or in the office. This includes some very effective work in the resolution of disputes and chasing debtors early on in the respective tenures of our Chief Executive, Andrew Mercer, and our Head of Support Services, Ray Hutchings.

The significant item mentioned by the Chairman was £426k spent on a variety of professional fees and contractor costs. Some of this was to catch up on work which should have been done in previous years and for which the costs, albeit perhaps lower, would have appeared earlier in any event. This includes, most obviously, the extensive work required to plumb in the Dimensions accounting system to its fullest effectiveness. In the finance department contractors were brought in to run the payroll, purchase ledger and management and statutory accounts functions. Since the appointment of the new Head of Support Services, there has been a progressive transfer from the use of consultants to employees and other streamlining such as outsourcing payroll to a bureau. The phasing of the replacement of the contractors has allowed efficient resolution of the PAYE and VAT issues, as well as training for new employees.

Some of the professional fees related to the work of the restructuring itself. Charity Law required us to seek professional advice on employment law and human resources, since the Council did not contain experts in these areas. Costs were higher than we would have wished because of defending Employment Tribunal claims and other litigation. The associated professional fees and settlements of all main claims have been included in the 2012 accounts.

The positive sides of the transition in 2012 was a significant improvement in revenue: by over 10%, to £4.9m from £4.4m in 2011.

Nearly two thirds of this improvement was from increased range use, most notably from our clients in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. They remind us of the NRA's duty to marksmanship, which is broader than consideration of even our flagship events. We remember that our charitable objects include the promotion of marksmanship in support of the defence of the realm, which is as much domestic and civilian as it is overseas and military.

A quarter of 2012's improvement in revenue has come from estate income. All users of Bisley have borne the frustration of some issues relating to the state of Camp in recent years and we should be particularly grateful for the patience of those many who lease accommodation, whose experience has been the worst. The last six months have seen significant initiatives in the maintenance of the estate, both on the ranges and around the sites, and we look forward to more during the remainder of this year.

A turnover figure of nearly £5m puts a number of other issues into perspective. The £65k loss for 2012 is little more than 1% of our turnover: in other words, for an organisation that has seen a lot of flux, a loss could easily be substantially greater than the narrow margin of 1% and in previous years it was. By contrast, I don't believe that any upcoming loss would be acceptable, especially given the NRA's need to build reserves if it is to approach the more robust financial standing which we all should wish.

Even moderate changes in our income and expenditure have the potential to return us to an equivalent amount in profit, if not more. The budget for 2013, set in December last year, is to generate a profit of £150k. The figures available to Council last month indicate, if anything, slightly better financial results for the year so far than had been planned in the budget. Clearly there is also a long way to go.

A robust financial standing for the NRA should come from its balance sheet in addition to sustained positive income. The most representative figure in the accounts is the net current assets or liabilities, in other words the assets deemed to be at our realistic disposal in the short-to-medium term. At the end of 2012, the NRA had net current liabilities of £247k, which is a position that must be reversed. The NRA needs positive net current assets, ideally cultivated by several years of steady modest profitability. As far as possible, this should be generated by maximised commercial income and improvements in and streamlining of financial procedures.

So far in 2013, we have seen satisfactory resolution of the PAYE question, for an amount well within our provision. At a VAT inspection last week, we presented a net amount due which is very close to the amount we had reserved, and we anticipate repaying the last £150k of the bank loan in the coming weeks. In this context, I would particularly like to recognise the work of the finance team in setting about these priority areas while also normalising some of the practises in our routine activities to ensure collection of amounts that are due into our association.

We can all be grateful for the commendable approach of those who have tried to remind the NRA, sometimes repeatedly, to issue invoices. Conversely, it is in the interests of all members that if bills are disputed, then at least the undisputed elements of those bills should be paid. We all need to remember that a pound paid into the NRA is a pound available to sustain our sport; one that is not spent is a drain on our sport; and a pound that is delayed is asking fellow members to carry it.

Some very positive work in all of these areas has served to reduce the net current liabilities figure to something closer to £200k already this year.

I would like to comment on one last financial area – that of pricing. Part of the balance to be struck is to make every realistic effort to optimise value for money, without expecting one constituency among our members to subsidise another. Within the bounds of our charitable objectives, we should seek to generate suitable support for shooting activities from other parts of the estate, bearing in mind that in many cases this income is from shooting sources also.

I now hand over to Andrew Mercer. Thank you.

Chief Executive:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been asked to give you what is, in essence, an end of term report for my first six or so months as Chief Executive.

I think my first comment and observation is that in many respects it is a miracle that the NRA is still here with some of the woeful commercial practices that we found when we started. That said, the fact that the NRA is still here, is still active, is something down to a number of resources that the NRA have to hand.

We have fabulous world-class ranges here; we have, curiously enough, a rapidly growing membership; as at today our membership is growing at a rate of about 100 people per month, which I think is one of the largest increases that we've had for some time. The NRA is also able to call on a veritable army of enthusiastic and skilled volunteers that turn out very willingly many times through the year to deliver terrific services for shooting and the many activities here at Bisley.

And we also have a very rich and weighty history that at times bears down on our shoulders, but also I think gives us great guidance when we start planning the ways for development for the future.

In terms of looking ahead, I have been charged by the Trustees to develop a three year development and strategic plan for what we are to do, both the NRA as an association, and Bisley and that plan is very much in my mind at the moment. I am trying to understand the many complexities and contradictions that is Bisley and the NRA. An early draft of that will be going to the Trustees in September this year, for further and lengthier consultation and an ultimate delivery in 2014/2015/2016.

I am very keen that there is a plan that we all understand that as many people as possible sign up to. Within that plan there will be very substantial demands for capital investment and targets very much on my 'to do' list include new shooting initiatives, the improvement of what is a very tired and, in many cases a shabby infrastructure here at Bisley, electronic targetry, a very pet subject of mine. We will very shortly be trialling some electronic targets at Butt 19 on Century Range to help give us some guidance as to the wisdom of a further more intensive roll out.

And also, in terms of the support that I think we are going to give to the provision of ranges in the region. I think it is very easy for us to forget that we are the *National Rifle Association* and having a vibrant and successful Bisley, which I am very confident we can deliver, is only part of the story. We need to have a vibrant and successful shooting network actually across the rest of the country.

I think looking ahead, we need to also invest further resources in keeping a very big and firm line on legislation. I think for too long we've been very much playing catch-up, reacting to legislative announcements rather than being part of the discussions that form legislation and procedures and we need to engage much more earlier, much more convincingly with the Police and Home Office and other statutory bodies.

We also need to get a grip and take a much more dynamic and active role in our relationships with the PR and the national, local and regional media. I think, to be frank, keeping our heads below the parapet and hoping all the awkward questions go away, is far too dangerous a position to take, and we need to get active and we need to get involved.

We also need to play a much greater role in protecting and securing access for civilian shooting at MoD ranges. This, I think, is a very substantial threat, a very real threat today and I think that threat will only grow in its seriousness. And again, I think we need to play a more active role and make sure that role and those input are properly and effectively resourced.

When I started there were great concerns about the appetite for full-bore shooting in the country. I don't see it. I think there is a huge demand for people to become involved in shooting. The real challenge I think is accessibility and affordability, and I think we need to develop plans that address both of those.

I was particularly delighted to see 1,053 people hove into view with virtually no advertising for the Open Day and the atmosphere and enthusiasm of those new people to shooting left a real lasting impression on me.

I think it is important that we don't forget we are a charity. The National Rifle Association is NOT a gentleman's shooting club. It is a registered charity and I think it's important that we engage with the wider membership. The membership is a key asset for the charity, it is a key asset in the delivery of the many and important charitable objectives that we are charged to deliver.

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to thank those of you who have given me, what has been a delightful amount of encouragement, a not so delightful amount of criticism, and a veritable avalanche of advice. It has been a real interesting experience actually engaging with members and dealing with the many opinions and often contrary contradictory advice that I get.

But I think that people's passion and enthusiasm to the cause has been really rewarding and very encouraging. Finally, just as an aside, I am having an absolute whale of a time and my first six months have been a real delight, and I am very much looking forward to working with you with the many challenges we face ahead.

On that note, I shall hand back to the Chairman.

ROUND OF APPLAUSE

Chairman:

We now come to the open forum.

Now, what I would like to do initially is ask your questions on the Annual Report and Accounts. When we have completed that, I would like to move to the petition concerning the costs of the Imperial Meeting and have the discussion on that item, and then finally move to any other questions which you wish to raise.

Now when you come to speak, will you please use the microphone and hold it as I am now, touching your chin. Last year, I was asked to listen to the tape recording of one particular member, and I listened to it 12 times, and haven't the faintest idea what he was saying.

Now also, when you come up, could you give your name and club. We have a roving microphone down in the body of the hall, so with that I would ask for questions on the Accounts and Annual Report.

NO QUESTIONS RAISED

I think all I can say is 'bloody hell'.

LAUGHTER

Right, that has dealt with the Accounts and Annual Report.

I will now call on Rick Shouler to present his petition.

Matthew Charlton:

Richard told me to let you know he is delayed in traffic and is expected to be here about 18.15pm.

Chairman:

OK, then we will have to deal with any other things.

Crispin Scott – Edinburgh Rifle Association

I'm sorry Chairman, we can't let you get away with it this evening. Looking around the room, it is a little bit depressing there are not more people here, and I think we are a national rifle association and I think that was very clearly identified by the new Chief Executive.

Can I ask, can you give us some idea of the demographic within the membership of the NRA. I think it is interesting, perhaps it's symptomatic here in this particular meeting when there are so few people present, that this time on a Friday afternoon is probably the worst time except for civil servants and those who are able to control their own agenda. So for us to get here is exceedingly difficult. But could you give us an idea of how we are doing in recruiting more younger members of the NRA, and addressing the requirements of them.

Chairman:

I don't have specific numbers. I don't know whether, Andrew, you've got any numbers?

Chief Executive:

They would only be wild guesses which I wouldn't, shouldn't really offer. To be frank, any young figures, we have got some quite good, detailed analysis, and the membership department did provide some really interesting statistics. Sadly they're not in my head, they're on my laptop, but we would be very happy to perhaps publish a quick analysis on the website for you to pick up after this meeting.

Crispin Scott:

Thank you.

Ken Shorthouse – Secretary of British Snipers Club:

Last year, I brought up the situation where we called for a member of the Shooting Committee for the McQueen discipline of shooting. Could the Committee tell me what's happened about this. I did have a meeting with Iain Robertson as mentioned, and it was successful, but we've heard nothing since. Thank you Mr Chairman.

Chairman:

Yes, you caught me by surprise on that one. Well, we have the Chairman of the Shooting Committee here as well as Iain Robertson, so perhaps between the two of them, can you say?

John Bloomfield, Chairman of Shooting Committee:

I do remember a letter on that, I thought I had replied to it, but perhaps I did not. In principle we would not look at co-opting someone onto the Committee simply for a single competition. We have discipline representatives for all disciplines, elected by the membership, and they have sufficient expertise in that particular competition dealing with any matters arisen from it in my Chairmanship. Thank you.

Doug Watt – West Suffolk Rifle Club

Recently the Chief Constables are applying for an increase in the cost of renewing your firearms certificate. Could you inform the AGM what approaches the National Rifle Association are going to make with regards to this, which I would say, is an unwarranted increase.

Chairman:

The NRA is working through the British Shooting Sports Council on this because it was felt that a united front from the shooting organisations is the best approach. The police have made various claims that at the moment they are only recovering about 25% of the total costs. It's not clear, the costs are divided into two – those costs which by law they are required to cover, and then there are the other costs which again, by law, they are required to bear themselves. It's not quite clear. I think the total that they claim they want to raise from each shooter is about £190. We are currently paying £50 for a renewal, and I think £60 for a grant.

The British Shooting Sports Council has said that they accept that an increase in line with inflation, and the last increase was in 2001, would be perfectly acceptable. We are very concerned, BSSC and the NRA for that matter, we are very, very concerned about the inconsistencies between one police force and another. They are very substantial.

So we have been saying we want to see improvements, more uniformity between police forces, more efficiency. The Home Office Minister has also been telling the police he wants to see more efficiency. It's not quite clear where this is all going to end up, but I suspect a decision will be made this year, possibly sooner rather than later and a fee, possibly of the order of £90 odd for a renewal will be what is required.

That's about half the cost claimed by the police for doing the work and the idea would be using e-commerce so that you can send in your applications by online systems, that that will reduce costs. And with renewals the idea is that there should not be a home visit every time. There should be a risk assessment done to reduce the costs of the police. There is one police force, the Met, who are using policemen who are more highly paid than non-police staff, and the suggestion from us clearly is that they should use the less highly paid staff in order to reduce their costs.

There is clearly a problem with this huge disparity in costs in that one police force, Durham, has been very highly criticised, not only by the coroner, but also by the Police Complaints Commission. So they have failed in what they were doing, and they are going to have to pull their socks up. They are actually piloting a scheme where they require an applicant to produce a letter or a form from their doctor saying that they are fit to have a certificate, and as of, I think 2 days ago, they have reviewed 900 certificates, and they have removed 180. That's 20% on the grounds of medical evidence. We don't know how many of that 180 are going to appeal, and we don't know how many will win their appeals. But if that number were repeated across the country then it will be very worrying, but from a politician's point of view and the general public's point of view, it's going to be now very difficult to argue against medical evidence and that is the next issue which is going to have to be dealt with by the British Shooting Sports Council and they are very well aware of that and have a meeting with the Home Office shortly.

Paul Charlton –

Following on from your point about medical evidence, I seem to recall the unfortunate incident in Cumbria. The person involved was a taxi driver and in order to get a taxi licence you have to be medically examined by your GP. So unfortunately just going through the process of having some medical evidence will not resolve all the issues that the general public would like to see resolved.

How can we show our doubt in medical evidence proving the deciding factor? Do we have any well qualified doctors within our community who would perhaps help us with this?

Chairman:

This came up yesterday in a meeting with BSSC, and I emailed Nick Jeffs who is our medical advisor last night asking what sort of doctor do we need, what particular skills, is it psychiatrist, psychologist, GP. What sort of standing in the medical profession and I am waiting to hear back from him, then we can have a look to see whether we have such a person amongst our membership who is willing to give the time.

I think it is inevitable we will have to pay for that person's services, but I suspect it will be a very sensible use of money. You're absolutely right, after the Cumbria killings, it was again said by the politicians you can't legislate for a madman who flips his lid within sort of 24 hours. But it's also clear that if the 180 revocations in the Durham area are justified, then there is a use for medical evidence. That's our problem – we just don't know at the moment how to refute some of these arguments.

Harold Dunton – West Suffolk Rifle Club

From time to time there have been calls for a national body to issue firearms certificates. I urge caution on this point because I have lived in the Metropolitan area and I have the privilege of living in rural Suffolk. The standards of the Metropolitan area are certainly inapplicable to rural Suffolk. So think very carefully before you support any view of a national licensing body.

Chairman:

Thank you for that observation.

I think we are a long way from having a national body for issuing certificates, but there is a national computer on which all certificates are recorded.

Debbie Andrews – University of London Rifle Club

Firstly, I just wanted to compliment the NRA on the British Sporting Rifle Open Day a few months ago. I thought it was very well run and very well priced.

My second question is regarding the Young Shooters Fund. I have been lucky enough to benefit from it myself but I noticed it's not very well advertised and I wondered if there are any plans to expand that, particularly at the moment when shooters are struggling.

Chief Executive:

I think that's a very good point, well made. It's one of the good things that the NRA do. I think it is not particularly well promoted and I think it should be far better resourced. And I am pleased that it's actually suiting you well and helping you on your journey. Again, thank you, a good point well made.

Karen Robertson – Chairman of Young Shooters Fund

As you know, as most years I ask for the accounts of the Young Shooters Fund and they have been incorrect for several years, and so for about the last 3 or 4 years we haven't done anything about advertising because we don't know how much is in the fund that we can spend. I would like to add that John Bloomfield has put a lot of work into it this year and has got it very nearly right. The figure in the accounts we've just received are actually incorrect but, I have brought it to their attention and they are working on it. Once we get to a situation we know how much available cash we've actually got to spend, then yes, we will publicise it and get people into it. If anyone does know of anyone who really does need any help just come to see me or drop me a line. Thank you.

Chairman:

A question from Matt at the back?

Matthew Charlton – Old Guildfordians

Two bits related. The first one is I have had a call from Richard (Schuler) telling me he is stuck behind an accident in Buckinghamshire.

Related to that, and following on from the gentleman's earlier point about it, might the NRA consider holding this meeting at a time when it is easier for people who work to get to.

Chairman:

We are clearly open to suggestions as to a time and a place. We are not wedded to having it on the Friday before the InterCounties. It's been done like this, I guess, because we hoped there might be a reasonable attendance of shooters. It's not bad what I see in front of me, but it could be a lot larger.

So OK, I think we will ask the General Council for their views on this.

Matthew Charlton:

I suspect if it was slightly later this evening or maybe after shooting tomorrow there would be higher attendance.

I neglected to mention, Richard asked Robin, because he has sent you a copy of the petition and a summary of suggestions, might you be able to read them out please.

Chairman:

Alright, let's just find them.

Well, are there any other questions before we go into the petition?

Crispin Scott:

We talked about finance and we've talked about the variety of expertise and cost of various police constabulary areas. What is absolutely clear and I think there is quite a lot of it, is the, there are some huge enthusiasts who are really knowledgeable like firearms officers, and people operating for their various constabularies, but there are also some people who really have no knowledge or understanding except for the very technical understanding of the letter of the firearms law. They don't know how to interpret it exactly and they don't really know the implications of what's involved. One thing the NRA could do is, and BASC has gone a long way to find an opening to address some of the key issues, is to get their heads around a table with the various police forces and perhaps talk to them, or at least try to establish a uniform standard of understanding of firearms and firearms law and how it impacts on shooters across the country. And I think that is probably is the role of the national body rather than the Rifle Association.

Chairman:

Yes, that is a very good point. We, working again with the British Shooting Sports Council, have done this sort of thing with regard to Home Office staff who changed a year or so ago and gave the impression they didn't know what a rifle was. That actually was very successful. It was down here at Bisley. We got the Home Affairs Committee down here, under Keith Vaz and I think we really opened their eyes, certainly we got thanked by Keith Vaz for helping him and his people understand. So there clearly is an educational role we should, and could, play.

There is a conference in September at which, I am told, there should be a representative from every police force and I, and various others, are going to that, where we would hope to educate them. But it would be far better if they were down here, then they could actually see the variety of firearms we use, which is very considerable, and actually let them have a go. So, yes, it is in the minds of the BSSC that we should educate the police as much as we possibly can.

Thank you.

OK, so we go onto the petition.

It says...

Dear John Webster and Robin Pizer,

Petition to lower the cost of shooting to an affordable level.

I am writing to you to make a request that you review the pricing structure of the Imperial Meeting, but moreover, shooting at Bisley generally.

I enclose a petition signed by approximately 300 people, over a third of all entries of last year's entries to the Imperial, who agree that we are at a critical point in time.

In recent years we have witnessed the rapid decline of competitor entries at the Imperial Meeting from a steady 1,000 plus upwards, to 2010, then a rapid decline to 860 in 2012, a drop of approximately 20%. And at Bisley in general, that's Inter Counties and Purples etc. This is arguably inextricably linked with the price increase of the Imperial Meeting which have gone up by approximately 15%. We all, of course, understand that through this double dip recession, everyone is feeling more pain with the increasing cost of living, petroleum products for example have gone up 49p per litre since 2009.

Due to the recession, individuals who are on a lower income are having to give up much, shop elsewhere for food and products that are cheaper. Aldi and Lidl saw record profits this first quarter when the big supermarket chain profits fell. They address their utility costs, look at car usage etc. There are essentially tightening their belts.

Conversely, the NRA have increased their costs to a level where we are now seeing a significant drop in turnover. I would like to suggest this is not something we are likely to see in the future, but is already happening now, and as such I decided to put together a voice from a contingent from the NRA members in the form of a petition.

Whilst I understand that the Imperial Meeting is only shot by a fraction of the NRA 6,000 strong members, I felt that we needed to start somewhere and make a petition suggestion smart. The Imperial Meeting has been the flagship event on the Marksman's Calendar since 1860 and something, I believe everyone is proud to be part of.

I would like this to be raised either on the agenda, or in AOB at the NRA AGM in June if that is at all possible, and I intend to be there as the founder of this petition.

Would you please direct me to what I need to do, who to speak to, to get this recognised at the AGM.

Ultimately, the NRA I would suggest, has one customer, and the customer is diminishing. In order for shooting to continue, I believe we must look to make sacrifices and endure some discomfort to get through what I hope to be a tough, but not permanent time to ensure the future of the sport is very healthy.

I enclose two documents; one is all the comments left by those who chose to leave comments on the petition, and the other is a summary of all suggestions made to me on how the NRA can improve its financial situation and increase its Imperial Meeting entries.

I thank you for taking the time to look over this letter, and look forward to seeing you on the ranges soon.

Yours sincerely and respectfully

Rick Schuler

I don't propose to read through a page and a half of suggestions. Those of you who have been following the petition will have seen those comments anyway. So I think at this point I will perhaps ask John Bloomfield, who is Chairman of our Shooting Committee, to make a few points in response.

John Bloomfield:

Thank you Chairman.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Council has passed the direction of looking at the costs of the Imperial Meeting to the Shooting Committee. We discussed it extensively at our last meeting, which was on 23rd May, so fairly recently, and the first major part of that, or what is going to happen, is our new Chief Executive, Andrew Mercer, is going to conduct, in August after this year's meeting, a full scale review of what the costs and income from the meeting are.

One of our difficulties in the past has been that the Imperial Meeting has been accounted for in a number of different ways, over certainly the time I have been involved with the NRA and its Councils. It seems to have been done to suit the argument as to what it cost at the time.

What we actually want to do is try to work out the accurate costs of what, or how much it actually costs us to put the meeting on, at which point you can then decide depending on whether its making a profit, breaking even, or making a loss as to where you go from there.

So essentially, we have to determine the costs before we address whether we can reduce entry fee prices or not.

That's the first part of it, the second part of it is we can consider other ways of reducing the costs of the meeting, but I don't propose to go into a lot of detail. Richard Schuler has given us quite a lot of suggestions and we will follow up on those, but one of the principal ones which has been raised before, and this came up at the BGM last year during the Imperial Meeting, was the question of returning to competitor marking.

It was a point put to me about 18 months ago by a long term shooter, long service shooter who had been involved with schools, and he and I discussed it in detail, principally because he was concerned for the youngsters, as I think we all are.

If you go back to competitor marking, and I am talking only of the TR meeting, you have to accept, or it will have to be accepted that you can only do so at the expense of the number of rounds that you fire in the meeting. Those of you who shot in those days will remember that each of the major days of the TR meeting, you had one marking stint. That filled the gaps that are currently in the programme, or you would go off and sit and jaw with your friends, or have a beer or a cup of tea or whatever.

So those gaps would no longer exist, but the most important change to the proceeds, the long range competition currently shot on second Wednesday, i.e. the same time as the Queens, would have to go because you go and do that shoot in the time that you would have otherwise done a marking stint in the past. So the amount of shooting on Wednesday would go down by one competition. The other effect on the number of rounds would be the two 15 round shoots, the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph, would have to revert to 10 round shoots that they were before.

The net saving if we did all of that, and I'm talking only for Grand Aggregate at this point, would be round about £60. That's accounting for the marking, accounting for the lost competition which you can't fit in anywhere else and accounting for the same in the ammunition. It's that sort of order of change.

There will clearly be another smaller saving if you go back to competitor marking on the first Friday and Saturday.

So those are the sort of numbers that might come out of the review. I've merely taken the return to competitor marking as an example of what can be done. It's not the only thing – there are lots of other things we can look at, and will be looking at. But to my mind, the essential thing is that we have the costs analysis in front of us first to make informed decisions rather than trying to make decisions on the hoof and then finding a year on down the line they come back to bite us.

I think that's all I have to say Chairman and clearly, if people have questions, I will attempt to answer them, or you will attempt to answer them.

Chairman:

So, does anyone have a question or want to make a point on this topic?

Paul Charlton – Stock Exchange Rifle Association and Chartered Accountant

What accounting expertise is going to be involved in this review by the Shooting Committee?

Chairman:

This is not something that will just be done by the Shooting Committee. Our staff, that is Andrew here, and Ray Hutchings, they will both be looking very carefully at the costs and that's where the accounting expertise will come in. And they will tell us what it has cost and where there might be areas of savings.

David Mumford: Life Member

I was an employee here for some 16 years and in 1995 when I started working here, I said 'why don't we cost the Imperial. Everything else I helped with we costed. We just don't cost the Imperial and I can't understand it. Since 1995 I have said that repeatedly but nobody wanted to listen. Thank you.

Chairman:

I agree with you. I suspect I have said similar things in the past. Certainly in the last 3 years I have wanted to know the full cost of this and not just the Imperial Meeting, everything the NRA does, I want to know the cost. Now I believe we are in a position where we can get that information.

Was there another question?

Is that it?

In that case I will draw the meeting to a close and thank you very much for your attendance and I hope that if you are shooting over the weekend, you thoroughly enjoy it.

ROUND OF APPLAUSE