

Revenue Management Association

NEWSLETTER



Country Conference Edition

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Hello and welcome to the second edition of the RMA newsletter for 2001/2002.

I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy New Year.

Hope you enjoy the newsletter if you have any suggestions/items for the newsletter, Please contact the Editor Vanessa Faulkner – 9433 3286 or email, Vanessa.faulkner@nillumbik.vic.gov.au

Next Meeting 15/3/02

The March Meeting of the Association is traditionally held at a Country venue, and this year it will be at Wangaratta, on **Friday, 15th. March 2002.** The actual venue is the **Wangaratta Gateway Hotel/Motel Convention Centre**, which is renowned as one of the major convention centres in North East Victoria. Page 2 of the Newsletter contains details of the accommodation packages available. As is usually the case, we will organise an informal "nibbles, drinks and dinner" for members and their partners who decide to stay overnight on Thursday 14th. March 2002.

• Privacy Act

Due to a number of issues relating to the privacy act the RMA committee have suggested we have a training day to discuss the issues regarding the act. Further details will be open for discussion at the March meeting.

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PUZZLES PAGE



Can you unscramble the 10 Council's below, the first three person's to email vanessa.faulkner@nillumbik.vic.gov.au with the correct 10 answers by Wednesday 13th March will be the winners.

1. SITWAETHEL
2. RALALATB
3. NTSORKAFN
4. TACOSSABS
5. PSCMAEPA
6. GAMANROTIEC
7. YNBNOGIRMANR
8. DEXRANLAENTMUO
9. NERYEPSE
10. KBAICRRYAAIM

Winners of the Dec 01 Competition

The Word find Answer was COUNCIL which was spelt COUNIL
The Book Shelf Puzzle Answer was ASSOCIATION spelt ASSOCIATON

First Prize : Yvonne Condello, Peter Horne, Lisa Cartledge, Neil Cooper.

Second Prize : Kerrie Wellington, Chris Lee, Neil Hawkes, Anita Squires, David McSwain, Graeme Tindle, Doug Paterson, Narelle Stevens.

PRIVACY ACT



Audit of records and registers

- What personal information does Council hold now that is essentially historical and is not being managed or updated in the same way it was when it was created?
- What personal information is the Council collecting now?
- How is the personal information being used?
- Is the personal information secured in any way?
- How is the personal information being destroyed?

Privacy policies and procedures

- Are there any existing policies or procedures being used now to deal with collection, management, use and disclosure of personal information?
- How will it apply to information on Council's website?
- What is an appropriate complaints handling procedure?
- Should there be community consultation on this policy?

Disclosures and consents

- What personal information does the Council disclose to 3rd party?
- How many contracts with 3rd parties involve collection, use and disclosure of personal information?
- Why is it disclosed, how is it used by that 3rd party?

Appointment of Privacy officer & implementation group

- Who will be the Privacy Officer?
- Who should be on the implementation group?
- What planning and implementation is required to comply with the Act?

Training

- Who is involved in the collection, handling and disclosure of personal information?
- What training do we require?
- Will training extend to council contractors?

Code of practice

- Is a code of practice required by your organization record keeping system?
- Will the Act be sufficient?
- Should a code for the whole sector be developed?

Conclusion

The information held and provided by councils is the cornerstone of our ability to provide superior service, most important assets in any organization is our customer and customers trust.

Keeping customer information secure, and using it only as our customers would want us to, is a code of practice that all council's will have to develop, Good luck.



Country Conference March 15th 2002

www.wangarattagateway.com.au.

The Country Conference will be held at Wangaratta Gateway for information regarding the venue go to the above website or see your registration form for details.

An Informal dinner will be arranged on the Thursday night for further details contact Paul Browne on 9205 5261 or Vanessa Faulkner on 9433 3286. Those wishing to stay Thursday or Friday night, RMA have some rooms on hold until 28 February 2002.

To book a room for either Thursday or Friday night please contact the gateway directly on 1800 033 439 remember to tell them you are with the Revenue Management Association to receive a 10% discount.

Room prices are as follows

Room	Price	10% Discount
Queen Suite		
Single	\$ 99.00	\$ 89.10
Double/Twin	\$109.00	\$ 98.10
Deluxe Suite Bath size Spa		
Single	\$104.00	\$ 93.60
Double/Twin	\$114.00	\$102.60
Corporate Deluxe Bath Size Spa		
Single	\$109.00	\$ 98.10
Double/Twin	\$119.00	\$107.10
Premier Suite Large Corner Spa		
Single/Double	\$165.00	\$148.50
Interconnecting Suites 4 Persons Bath Size Spa	\$179.00	\$161.10
Family Suite - 4 Persons	\$134.00	\$120.60
Extra Person	\$ 10.00	

PRESIDENTS REPORT



Welcome to the first edition of the R.M.A. Newsletter for the 2002 calendar year, which appears most likely to be a year full of challenges for our profession, with Council Elections scheduled for many Councils; re-valuations to be completed in the next couple of months; and implementation of the new Information Privacy Act 2000.

The Association's December Meeting in the Legends Restaurant at the Moonee Valley Racecourse, was an outstanding success, with 124 members and guests in attendance, at one of the best Conference venues in Melbourne. We are indebted to our sponsors for that day, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia; Ibis Information Systems; MAPS Group; E-Coles Myers; and Technology One. Their generous, and ongoing support of the R.M.A., is greatly appreciated.

One of the highlights at the December Meeting, was the very professional and informative presentation by Catherine Symons from Russell Kennedy, Solicitors, on the Information Privacy Act 2000. The interest shown in that presentation, has resulted in the Executive Committee resolving to organise a workshop, or a series of discussion groups, on the Legislation, if members indicate their wish to participate. Further details on this are contained in the Newsletter.

Support the Association by registering for the Meeting as soon as possible; and by inviting potential members to be your guest for the day. The strength of the R.M.A. is its diverse membership and the expertise of the members, but we still have a number of Councils, and businesses/organisations, that are not members. One of my aims, as President, is to achieve an increase in the Association membership, by having, at the very least, a member from every Council in Victoria.

The President of the N.S.W. Rating Professionals has extended an invitation for the R.M.A. to attend their Annual General Meeting, in Albury on Thursday, 14th. March 2002. The R.M.A. will be represented by Ian Holland, Immediate Past President, and myself. Time permitting, we will present a report on our attendance at the A.G.M., to our Meeting on the 15th.

The Association's Web Site at www.rma.FormsExpress.com.au has been subject to a most extensive upgrade, under the direction of Mario Patti, and contains a wealth of current information, and direct links to associated entities. I encourage all members to access the Site and take advantage of the information that is provided, the chat room options, the bulletin board etc. The Association is most appreciative of the amount of time and effort put into the upgrading of the Site by Chris Zogopoulos, which will be suitably recognised next month; and of the ongoing support provided by Express Promotions through Forms Express.

As I stated in my first President's Report, this is your Association, and the Executive Committee can only meet your needs and aspirations if we know what the members want in terms of guest speakers, meeting formats, specialised workshops, meeting venues, social activities, special presentations etc. Similarly, if you have a concern or an issue that you want to raise, let me or any other Executive Committee member know so that the matter can be addressed in the appropriate forum. I look forward to welcoming you to Wangaratta on the 15th. March 2002.

Haydn Williams, President.

PRIVACY ACT



Follow up presentation regarding "Information Privacy Act" held at Moonee Valley racing club on 7 December 2001. Presenter Catherine Symons from Russell Kennedy Solicitors. You need to be proactive within your council in getting it right from the start!

Your Privacy at your Council.

Keeping customer information secure is a top priority for all of us at all council's in Victoria. The new legislation has been introduced at State level in Victoria and affects any public sector body and local council. Compliance is required to be achieved by **1 September 2002**. Therefore, councils should have started to determine how to control and handle personal information.

Councils need to develop policies to cover the Collection, Use, Storage, Updating, Disclosure and Disposal of Information.

All Councils should appoint a Privacy Officer. That person should perform an Audit, develop policy, train staff and review contracts with suppliers. Further information is obtainable from www.privacy.vic.gov.au.

The important objectives of the Information Privacy Act are:

1. To establish regime for the responsible collection, storage, handling and disclosure of personal information.
2. To provide individuals with rights of access to information about themselves which is held by the organization.
3. To provide individuals with the right to request an organization to correct and amend information about them held by the organization, including information held by contracted services providers.

The 10 Information Privacy Principles (IPP) contained in the Information Privacy Act are:

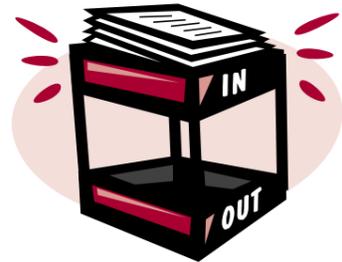
- Principle 1 - Collection
- Principle 2 - Use and disclosure
- Principle 3 - Data quality
- Principle 4 - Data security
- Principle 5 - Openness
- Principle 6 - Access and correction
- Principle 7 - Unique identifiers
- Principle 8 - Anonymity
- Principle 9 - Trans border data flows
- Principle 10 - Sensitive information

Implementation plan:

The plan to prepare for compliance should deal with the following issues:

- Audit of records and registers
- Privacy policies and procedures
- Disclosures and consents
- Appointment of Privacy Officer & Implementation Group
- Training
- Code of Practice

THE INS & OUTS OF THE RMA



Membership fees for 2001/2002 are steadily rolling in. If you haven't paid your fees yet, please send your payment to **PO Box 596, Doncaster, Vic, 3108**. If you wish to check any details or require a copy of your Renewal Notice, please send me an Email (rodleith@ballarat.vic.gov.au).

Membership is looking quite healthy at the moment with 198 individuals or Corporations registered.

We welcome the following new members who have joined during the past few months.

Mr. Kevin Clarke	Golden Plains
Mr. Paul Daniel	Fujitsu Australia
Mr. Barry Martin	Wangaratta
Ms Tracy Dalla-Zuanna	Yarra
Ms Leanne Harnett	Loddon
Ms Julie Ritchie	Loddon
Mr. Philip Moloney	Boroondara
Ms Maria Dunn	Mitchell
Complete Debt Solutions Pty Ltd	

The following members have recently resigned from the RMA due to the fact they no longer work in Local Government or no longer have an association with revenue collection services.

Ms Lois Mendoza	Boroondara
Ms Sharon E. Webb	Murrindindi
Mr Craig Findlay	Greater Geelong
Ms June Farquhar	Yarra

The Committee would like to thank all of the above members for their interest in the RMA and wish them all the best in their future careers. We hope that they have all gained something from being a member.

If you're wanting to sign up a new member, a Membership Application form can now be obtained from our website, www.rma.FormsExpress.com.au.

2000/2001 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OMBUDSMAN

THE REPORT IS MADE PURSUANT TO SECTION 25 OF THE OMBUDSMAN ACT 1973.

www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

MR B W PERRY OMBUDSAM.

RATE ISSUES

The Local Government Act confers upon council's power to defer rates or charges payments or to waive whole or part payment in cases of financial hardship. One complaint I dealt with came from a ratepayer who sought waiver of rates on the ground of financial hardship. The council's rate notice indicated that ratepayers suffering financial hardship could apply for waiver or deferral of rates, charges and interest. However, when the ratepayer applied for waiver, he received a letter from the council advising that it does not waive rates. Following an approach by my Office, the council's policy was reviewed and it was agreed that the council was obliged, in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act, to consider each application for waiver of rates on its merits. The complainant's situation was reviewed on that basis.

It has also come to notice that some ratepayers making appeals in regard to hardship or in regard to the refunds of overpayment of rates in previous years, have not been informed by council officers of their right to appeal to the elected council, which has the power to waive rates or to refund overpayment of rates in previous years, have not been informed by council officers of their right to appeal to the elected council, which has the power to waive rates or to refund overpayments. This matter has been brought to the attention of the offending officers.

Another complaint involved rate payments made by phone. The council's rate notice included payment by phone as an option and required payment 'no later than 30 November 2000'. The complainant made a phone payment on that date and was charged interest for late payment. The council's manager explained that payments made by phone, Internet or to other collection agencies are received by council on the following working day and, in some cases where payments are made after hours, it may take two to three days before council received the payment. After contact by my Office, council officers agreed that several days grace would be allowed for such payments to reach the council.

For a number of years, I have been concerned about the actions taken by councils to collect overdue rates. Often, when an incorrect address for the service of notices is recorded in council added costs, usually in the order of \$230. I can appreciate that it is the responsibility of landowners. However, I am concerned that such legal costs are incurred in some cases without councils making additional efforts to contact the landowner.

An example of this is the case where a conveyancer acting for the landowner at the time of purchase provided the old address of the purchaser and after settlement, the purchaser occupied the new property and the council was not advised formally that notices should be sent to that property. If the notices sent to the old address are not returned to council, the matter then proceeds in the manner discussed above.

However, I believe that it is not unreasonable to expect council to send reminder notices to the rated property before legal action is taken in cases where the address (on council's record) is not the address of the rated property. A small administrative charge could be considered for this service. I am putting this matter to councils.

Another rate related matter concerned a complainant who asserted that a council had failed to respond to his appeal against property valuation. Enquiries ascertained that the complainant's letter to council was received. Council's manager advised that the relevant officer believed that she had sent the letter to the contract valuer and had sent an objection form to the complainant for completion but there was no record of this or any other action. The manager agreed to accept a valuation form from the complainant and to act on it even though the time for appeals had closed.

There has been a dramatic increase in enquiries about alleged incorrect property valuations and the delays in council's response to appeals on these matters. These complaints involve many municipalities across the State. I understand that the problem, in part, has been caused by the requirement to carry out property valuations at two-year intervals, starting in early 2000. Valuations prior to this were carried out at either 4 year or 6 year intervals. Valuations were required across the State at the same time there was a lack of trained personnel to carry out the work. As a result, many valuations were the subject of appeals and revaluation's were not carried out within a reasonable time. Where properties were altered, for example, substantial property improvements carried out, revaluation's were not carried out within a reasonable period which resulted in ratepayers receiving revaluation's with substantial increases many months after they had paid their rates. Many of the enquiries to my Office would have been avoided had councils fully informed ratepayers of the reasons for the delays.

“POOR JUDGEMENT”



The Financial and Consumer Rights Council has recently published a fifty eight page report by Beverley Kliger and Associates on the legal enforcement of consumer debts under \$5,000.

This study analysed Melbourne Magistrates' Court logs from 30 June 1999 to 11 February 2000 and Dunn and Bradstreet records of default orders from 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000. It found that City based Councils (16.95%) and Country based Councils (13.35%) were among the main groups seeking judgement claims for debts under \$5,000.

Seventeen recommendations are proposed by the authors to improve the efficiency and fairness of the legal enforcement process. Among those of particular interest to Revenue practitioners, and the Debt Collection fraternity is No 14. "A small claims consumer debts enforcement process to be established in the Magistrates Court for debts under \$5,000. This debt recovery process to : Be administered by the Registrar of the Magistrates Court Apply a nominal fee. The Registrar to have the discretion to waive the fee if its imposition would create hardship for the debtor.

Be a low cost process – no claim for professional fees and out of pocket expenses by solicitors and mercantile agents preclude solicitors from appearing for debts of less than \$5,000."

There are also recommendations regarding the format of the notification of complaint, publication of debts, repealing Sections of the Judgement Debt Recovery Act, waiving or removing entitlement to penalty interest etc., as well as several tables, case studies and analysis of the current debt recovery process. For those interested, the publication is available by contacting the Financial and Consumer Rights Council on 1800 134 139, at a cost of \$32.50.

Article supplied by Paul Browne.

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Welcome to the RMA Webpage



WWW.FORMSEXPRESS.RMA.COM.AU

The RMA Website has undergone further changes and is looking great. There have been some additional areas that you will be able to access, some of the areas are still being worked on, including a new fully updated members list which will be available very soon.

To continually improve your website, we invite you to provide us with any ideas, comments, suggestions, work issues, anything you may want to see on the website.

Remember this is your website, and we urge you to utilise it to its fullest.

We will Shortly start to pick random names and provide prizes for users of your website- so get in there and have a look.

Corporate members may wish to link their own website to the RMA website, details may be provided to the committee for approval and implementation.

If you have any other issues relating to the website, contact Mario Patti on 9688 0350 or mario.patti@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au.

If you enter the website you need to press the "refresh" button at the top of your screen.

MEMBERSHIP FEES 2001-2002

If you have not paid your membership fees please do so as soon as possible. For information regarding membership contact Rod Leith on 5320 5518 or rodleith@ballarat.vic.gov.au

Corporate Directory

The RMA Corporate Directory was launched at the Dec 01 meeting which consists of 2 A4 folders for each Council. If you did not collect your Council's folders please tick the box on the registration form and you can collect them at the next meeting.

For any additions / changes within the directory please supply 78 copies of the new details to a committee member at the next meeting for distribution.

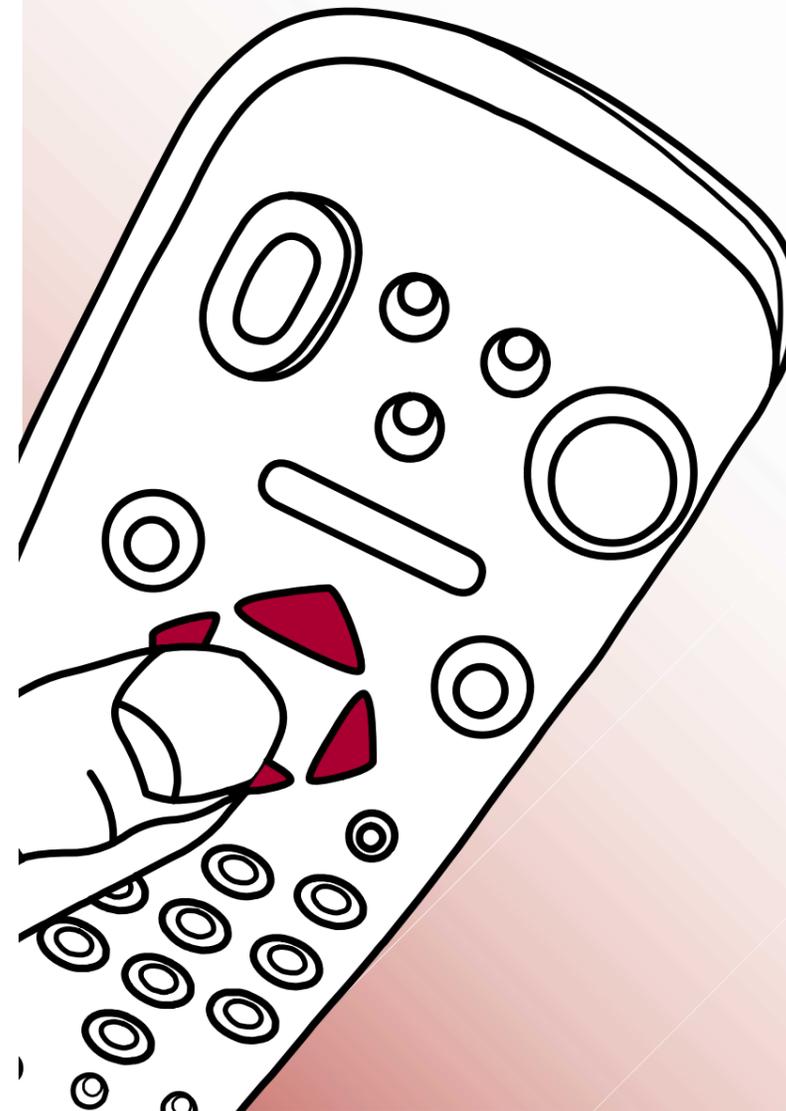
GREAT TRUTHS ABOUT LIFE

Success:

- At 4 success is - not wetting your pants
- At 12 success is - having friends
- At 16 success is - having a drivers licence
- At 20 success is - having sex
- At 35 success is - having money
- At 50 success is - having money
- At 60 success is - having sex
- At 70 success is - having a drivers licence
- At 75 success is - having friends
- At 80 success is - not wetting your pants

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only be Earned.**

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