Hello and welcome to everyone here in Coorparoo for one of the most important days on our Vision Australia calendar; the Annual General Meeting. As a national organisation we put a lot of planning into ensuring that we make our AGMs as accessible to members as possible. As most of you would know, the meetings are rotated around the three major sites and so I’m very happy to be back up here for Coorparoo’s turn again.

As always, this meeting will be recorded and available to be heard on Vision Australia Radio this Sunday at 2pm Daylight Saving Time, which will be 1pm in Queensland. It will also be available on an audio file on the internet.

This year we will also be streaming it live via webcam so that those members who can access the internet or attend our offices in Kooyong and Enfield will have logged in and be viewing or listening to the proceedings right now.

We are doing this as technological developments permit because the annual general meeting of company members, directors and the chief executive officer provides a demonstration of transparency and accountability which are the fundamental tenets of good governance.

In future years we hope to incorporate interactive streaming, making our AGM even more accessible to members on any device using the internet. It is not just important that we have good governance processes, it is important that those processes are transparent and our members, clients, staff and other stakeholders are able to receive and access up to date and reliable information about the organisation and its progress and development.

The Board has an oversight role in Vision Australia and there is a clear distinction between the functions reserved for directors and those delegated to senior executives. This clear delineation between the role of the directors and the executive leadership of the organisation is important for sound governance.

The Board acts on behalf of the members and it is accountable to the members. The Board identifies the expectations of members and monitors changes in government policy and community expectation.

The role of the Board and its relationship with management is governed by a Board-agreed charter. The responsibility for operations and administration is delegated by the Board to the chief executive officer.

The Board, the chief executive officer and the management team set the corporate strategic direction. The Board meets every six weeks and monitors the achievement of service targets and financial objectives against budget and other key performance indicators.

Our Board also has several committees which are proactive, strategic and appropriately address the statutory and moral responsibilities of directors through five committees.

We have continued to oversee the active management of costs and as many of you will know, this had led to some difficult decisions, including the closure of Vision Australia Enterprises.

With substantial losses from this division over the last few years due to global economic changes, we could not afford to continue subsidising these operations without jeopardising our overall budget.

We must make the most impact for people who are blind or have low vision and focus on the things we can do best to remain sustainable.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme, which is founded on individual choice and personalised funding, is one of the major changes to the disability services sector and has begun operations in a range of launch sites across Australia.

Vision Australia is represented at two sites this year, Newcastle and Geelong, and will be also available from our Canberra site next year.

I’m pleased to report that we are now in operating surplus, which our new CEO, Ron Hooton, will discuss further later. This is good news for the sustainability of Vision Australia as we face the new era of personalised funding and competition between service providers.

I am also pleased to report that we have almost completed a new strategic plan for Vision Australia for the next three years.

This plan has been the result of considerable consultation with clients, staff, volunteers and donors at many Vision Australia sites and the finalised plan is also being tested with further consultation. Again, this is good news for our sustainability and the final plan will be available on our website on completion.

Partnering, knowledge sharing and connection are all very important in the future of Vision Australia. In April next year we are looking forward to hosting, along with the City of Melbourne, Vision2014, the International Society for Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation's 11th International Conference on Low Vision.

Last year I announced that the recommendations of our Reconciliation Action Plan were underway with cultural development of our staff and the employment of indigenous trainees to ensure there are no unintended barriers to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island people accessing our services.

This year I am very happy to say that our three trainees, based at Newcastle, Wollongong and Albury, are linking with local communities and encouraging more clients from these communities to access our services. This bodes well for greater inclusion for all Australians.

This year also marks the retirement of three board members who have played a considerable role in the development of Vision Australia; Dr Keith Barton, appointed to the Royal Blind Society Council in 1998, Paul Gleeson, appointed to the Vision Australia Foundation Board in 1999 and Owen van der Wall, who joined the Royal Blind Society Council in 2001.

For many years Keith has been Chair of the Human Resources Committee, Paul has been the Chair of the Audit, Finance and Business Review Committee and Owen has been Deputy Chair of Vision Australia. These additional commitments have placed a significant additional demand on them as Board members.

On behalf of the Board and the whole of Vision Australia I would like to thank Keith, Paul and Owen for their many years of dedication to the work of Vision Australia. We appreciate your service.

Knowing that these retirements were coming the Board Development and Nominations Committee has worked hard to ensure that we attract new nominees of the calibre to ensure sustainability.

They have contacted members to seek expressions of interest for potential director nominations and worked in conjunction with a specialist in executive recruitment and through the Australian Institute of Directors to identify candidates for the Board who have the necessary skills and attributes for the Board to recommend to members.

A strong and diverse Board will provide the skills to guide the organisation through the changes which Vision Australia faces in the years ahead. I believe that we have a strong field with the credentials and experience to ensure our organisation’s continued development in the future.

Another director, Ron McCallum, has completed his time as Chair on the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is now deputy Chair on the same committee.

I would also like to acknowledge the passing at the beginning of the year of Maureen Davenport, an esteemed advocate and client. Maureen was the chairperson and driving force behind the Nundah and City Low Vision Support Groups in Brisbane and was a proud recipient of a Vision Australia Award. She was also a keen member of Blind Citizens Australia and the Queensland Braille Writers Association and she is greatly missed in our community.

I am pleased to welcome back staff, clients and others who have recently completed our fundraising trek along the Great Wall of China. This trek has raised more than $100,000.and has been a great opportunity for those taking part to experience one of the great wonders of the ancient world while also no doubt getting very fit!

I would like to thank David Speyer, our General Manager Corporate Services, who was our Acting CEO for much of last year and early this year and who took on the role with great commitment until our new CEO could begin.

I now have much pleasure in introducing Ron Hooton, our new CEO, who moved across the Tasman to join us in January this year and to take up the challenges of leading Vision Australia into the new era.