Hello and welcome to everyone here in Enfield and all of those members who have been able to join us from remote locations. As with every year, we aim to improve accessibility for members across Australia to enable increased participation in the Annual General Meeting. This year we have eight Vision Australia sites joining us by video conferencing which will enable members in those locations to join in the question and answer element of today’s meeting. As always, this meeting will be recorded and available to be heard on Vision Australia Radio this Sunday at 1:30pm Daylight Saving Time, which will be 12:30pm in Queensland. It will also be available as an audio file on the internet.

It has been a busy year for Vision Australia and the Board has worked closely with the Senior executive team to determine a strategic direction for the organisation that ensures our financial sustainability, our readiness for the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and above all our ability to meet the needs of our members and clients. This presents a challenging and complex environment for the board and the organisation.

The Boards role is one of oversight to use the diverse skills of our directors to explore why and how the organisation should make the most of opportunities and threats presented with the shifts in thinking, policy and markets. In line with policy, the board is subject to a periodic evaluation to assess it’s contribution to the manner in which Vision Australia operates consistent with the values and standards expected by its members and clients and the Vision Australia strategy. That evaluation has recently been completed by Michael Rich, a suitably qualified and independent reviewer.

The assessment found that the Board’s effectiveness compares favorably with other not-for-profit boards, that the Board has weathered the challenges of a merged environment and the legacies of the past. Now, the Board now largely possesses a culture that provides diversity in views and contributions and a governance framework that is practical and fit for Vision Australia’s purpose. In addition, the reviewer highlighted that all board members are committed to Vision Australia and their responsibilities, are conscientious and enjoy their time on the board.

All are here to make it a better organisation and give their time to this cause willingly and without hesitation. As with all reviews there are areas that the board has acknowledged which require improvement and these will be addressed. There is a clear distinction between the functions reserved for directors and those delegated to senior executives. And, the Board and management are mutually agreed on the ideals of choice and servicing client outcomes. We share same perspective regarding the core elements of the strategy and the five priority objectives.

Our new directors ensure we maintain a strong and diverse Board and bring a fresh perspective assist in guiding the organisation through the changes which Vision Australia faces in the years ahead. This year we have welcomed Sara Watts, Caroline Waldron and Heith Mackay-Cruise to the board. These directors bring with them outstanding professional credentials as well as leadership, finance, legal and commercial experience. More recently Bill Jolley joined the board. Bill has a long association with Vision Australia, Having led the integration of Seeing Eye Dogs Australia in 2008 and serving on the Client Representative Council and advisory committees.

I would also like to acknowledge the passing of Ross McColl. Ross brought extensive audit and financial management experience to the Vision Australia board and rigorously tested the financial statements and reports. Ross passed away earlier this year while serving on the board. His presence is missed.

Through a combination of strong operational management, effective fundraising and judicious management of the investment portfolio Vision Australia has achieved an operating surplus for the second consecutive year. This has been achieved without losing our focus on service delivery and client outcomes and during the start of a significant change program for the organisation.

We also marked this year with some significant activities and achievements. When Seeing Eye Dogs Australia merged with Vision Australia in 2008 our aim was to expand the Seeing Eye Dogs breeding and training programs and increase the number of seeing eye dog and client partnerships. In March this year, we opened the new Seeing Eye Dog breeding and training facility in Kensington, Victoria, which enables us to achieve both those outcomes.

In April this year Vision Australia, hosted Vision2014, the International Society for Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation's 11th International Conference on Low Vision. Over 600 low vision researchers and practitioners from around the world gathered at Vision2014 to hear about advances in research and techniques to upgrade practice and improve participation of those with low vision in designing their own services. The conference provided a great platform to showcase Vision Australia’s work with more than 20 research papers and posters presented by Vision Australia staff.

We have seen a significant advance in the Marrakesh Treaty with 79 nations, including Australia signing the World Intellectual Property Treaty. India is the first nation to ratify the treaty, when 20 nations have ratified it, organisations will be enable the copyright free exchange of share books and other accessible materials directly across international borders. Vision Australia will continue to lobby the Australian government to ratify the treaty.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the directors for their time and contribution to Vision Australia’s ongoing success and to acknowledge and thank the members of our Client Representative committee at local, regional and national levels. Your insights provide a valuable perspective for the board and the organisation.

I’d now like to introduce Ron Hooton, Vision Australia CEO. This AGM marks the first full financial year of Ron’s leadership.