

Progressive Atheists Inc.

Annual Report

1 July 2015 - 30 June 2016

Presented at Progressive Atheists Inc. Annual General Meeting
Monday, 31 October 2016

Report Approved By

Progressive Atheists Inc. Committee
Term 2016

President Alice Carr

Vice President Andrew Rawlings

Secretary & (acting) Treasurer Brian Jones

Ordinary Members

Peter Veitch

Trish Delaney

Rick Barker

Tracy Oliver

Paul Garrett

Carl Baig

Mary McPhail

Executive Summary

We started out Term 2016 focusing on End of Life choices with a workshop and a submission to the Victorian State parliament. Promoting freedom of choice in how we choose to end our lives. In September we met with the Hon. Bruce Atkinson, the President of the Legislative Council of the Victorian state parliament.

We made some efforts to counter Christian evangelism with awareness raised about evangelical preacher Ravi Zacharias in October 2015. In her book tour in November, Meg Wallace reminded us of the meaning of freedom from religion and what steps we should consider taking to ensure we retain our human rights. Although cancelled, the planned Religious Freedom Roundtable hosted by the Australian Human Rights Commission gave many freethinking groups from around Australia to meet and discuss priorities of secularism in Australia.

Term 2016 has been very much focused on assisting and promoting awareness of apostates and blasphemers in Muslim majority countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Indonesia. Combating Religious Persecution has been the major campaign theme for Term 2016.

August was our first reminder of the harms of theocracy with the International day against state religion. After a number of violent killings in Bangladesh of secular bloggers, we held a conference in Melbourne. The October conference, Secularism in the Modern World, featured guest speakers from Bangladesh and Pakistan.

January 2016 brought Sam Harris and Maajid Nawas to Australia via Think Inc. to again alert us to the perils for ex-Muslims, progressive Muslims, LGBTI Muslims, liberal Muslims, secular Muslims and all variety of people who are adversely affected by Islamist agendas. Again the 14th March allowed us to remind everyone to defend the human rights of apostates and blasphemers.

The month of May saw us bringing up our concerns about refugees in light of the upcoming federal election. Our election survey of candidates covered a range of concerns from freedom from religion in public schools, civil rights, the importance of a secular state to human rights and fairness in taxation.

Progressive Atheists hosted many events throughout the term, including the Progressive Atheists AGM in September 2015. In a multicultural tribute we celebrated the Persian celebration of Yaldā in a southern hemisphere Summer Solstice Party late December 2015. The new year started off with the 6th anniversary celebration of Progressive Atheists inception on the 10th of January 2015.

February 2016 gave us the chance to celebrate the Lunar New Year Festival and Darwin Day, paying homage to Charles Darwin and the scientific method. March allowed us to lend a helping hand in our local area during Clean Up Australia Day. We finished the term with our fellow travelers the Progressive Muslims at their Annual Interfaith Iftar dinner.

Progressive Atheists social media accounts, website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts are all doing well. Membership is at an all time high, we hope that this report highlights the valuable work done by Progressive Atheists, and we look forward to gaining new members in the year ahead.

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July 2015

End of Life Choices" Workshop for Atheists

A workshop to gather members and supporters views on end of life choices. Issues arose such as religious service providers clashing with atheist beliefs and concerns about prejudicial treatment of LGBTI and women.

Facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/591911587617372/>

Parliamentary Submission: End of Life Choices

The Victorian state government Legislative Council agreed on the 7 May 2015 to investigate end of life choices in Victoria. Progressive Atheists responded to the call for submissions to the inquiry. The committee investigated current practice for end of life choices, reviewed the current framework of legislation in Victoria and around the world and consider what type of changes could be made in context to Australian federal laws. Progressive Atheists made a submission in support of freedom in end of life choices.

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into end of life choices Final Report:

http://progressiveatheists.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/LSIC_pF3XBb2L.pdf

Progressive Atheists Submission:

<http://progressiveatheists.org/campaigns-projects/secularism/health-welfare-services/>

August 2015

International Day: Against State Religion

Ghulam Mustafa Lakho lives in Karachi, Pakistan and has been organising this annual event since 11 August 2009. The 11th August 2015 marked the 6th annual day against state religion. Mr Lakho also creates a petition each year to be presented to the Secretary-General, United Nations, at the UN Headquarters. Progressive Atheists supports and promotes this event each year.

August 2015 Facebook event:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/463152220499062/>

International Day: Against State Religion - Petition 2015:

<https://www.change.org/p/the-secretary-general-united-nations-recognize-the-international-day-against-state-religion-5>

September 2015

Meeting with Hon. Bruce Atkinson

Thursday, 17th September 2015 - 4.20 pm - 4.45 pm

Committee members Alice Carr, Andrew Rawlings and Brian Jones met with Hon. Bruce Atkinson. The aim of the meeting was to raise awareness of items of concerns to progressive atheists. Together we discussed the following:

1. Exemptions to anti-discrimination legislation
2. Government responses to the Report - Betrayal of Trust regarding the Catholic Church
3. End of life choices
4. Buffer zones for abortion clinics
5. Secular social service provisions
6. SRI and School Chaplaincy
7. Comparative religious education
8. Alternatives to the Lord's prayer in the Victorian parliament
9. Secular annual opening of parliament event
10. Blasphemy and apostasy laws overseas

Progressive Atheists Inc. Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, 29th September 2015

President, Alice Carr presented the Annual Report for Term 2015. The new committee was voted in.

<http://progressiveatheists.org/events/annual-general-meeting/annual-general-meeting-2015/>

October 2015

Evangelical Preacher - Ravi Zacharias Tour of Australia

Progressive Atheists responded to a request from Steve Baughman, a law attorney living in San Francisco, to raise awareness about the tour of Australia by evangelical preacher Ravi Zacharias. A press release was created and sent out and circulated throughout Progressive Atheists network in Australia.

Ravi Zacharias is visiting Australia 22 August – 30 August 2015

<http://progressiveatheists.org/campaigns-projects/evangelism/ravi-zacharias/>

Secularism in the Modern World – Melbourne – 2015

On 3rd July 2015 we had a first contact from a Bangladeshi blogger requesting our help. Within a few days others had also contacted Progressive Atheists asking for assistance. At that time Bangladeshi atheist, secular and freethinking bloggers had been under threat and many had already been brutally killed in public places and in their homes. As an organisation we felt it our duty to act and do all that we could to provide assistance to those in need.

On Saturday, 31st October 2015 Progressive Atheists held a conference in order to raise awareness of the plight of Bangladeshi bloggers, give a voice to ex-Muslims and minorities under threat, and raise funds to assist bloggers in grave danger overseas. All of our objectives were met and we are pleased to say that many bloggers managed to escape. Some are still living in limbo now, others are still in great danger and in need of continuing support and assistance.

Secularism in the Modern World - Melbourne - Conference - Facebook event:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1645843505701473/>

November 2015

Freedom From Religion? - Public Lecture, Melbourne

Meg and Max Wallace Melbourne visit mid November 2015

On the publication of her new book, "*Freedom From Religion*", Meg Wallace came on tour to Melbourne. The expression 'freedom of religion' has become so commonplace that few understand that in Article 18 of the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it was intended that non-belief in its various forms was to be understood to have the same protection as religion.

Freedom From Religion? - Public Lecture, Melbourne

<https://www.facebook.com/events/871286069645450/>

December 2015

Yaldā Solstice Party

Progressive Atheists enjoyed sharing the Persian festival celebration of Yaldā at the end of the year. Traditionally celebrated with the colour red, eating foods such as red fruits like watermelon, grapes and pomegranates, red wine and more.

The Yaldā *یلدا شب* Solstice Party is primarily a Persian (Iranian) cultural mid-winter solstice event but it is also popular in other countries. Progressive Atheists held the event to coincide with the one in Iran although starting a few hours earlier because of the time difference. All secular freethinking friends were welcome.

Yaldā Solstice Party:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/901142423304456/>

Progressive Atheists in the Pub

The end of year Progressive Atheists Open Meeting was held at the Matthew Flinders Hotel in Chadstone, Victoria. An opportunity to reflect on the year, what it means to be an atheist at Christmas time and look towards the year ahead.

Progressive Atheists in the Pub:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1511065625856940/>

January 2016

Progressive Atheists Inc. 6th Anniversary Celebration

10 January 2016 - Lunch in Geelong

Progressive Atheists members and friends met at the regular Geelong Atheists meetup to celebrate the 6th anniversary of Progressive Atheists. Founding member, Elida ran a quiz and gave out prizes.

Progressive Atheists Inc. 6th Anniversary Celebration

<https://www.facebook.com/events/554440344710356/>

Religious Freedom Roundtable

Progressive Atheists were invited to participate in a Religious Freedom Roundtable with the Australian Human Rights then Commissioner Tim Wilson on 18th February 2016. The roundtable ended up being cancelled when Tim Wilson changed plans, and resigned from his position to follow up a career in politics.

Although the roundtable was cancelled, the exercise wasn't without benefits. In preparation for the roundtable, on Tuesday 5 January 2015, a number of freethinkers from around Australia were able to meet and discuss issues of concern from the previous roundtable held in Sydney late 2015, and consider issues for a united front on secularism in Australia.

Religious Freedom Roundtable

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/projects/religious-freedom-roundtable>

Progressive Atheists Open Meeting to discuss AHRC Religious Freedom (Non-Faith) Roundtable

Saturday, 23rd January 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1660648007531231/>

An Evening with Sam Harris with special guest Maajid Nawaz

Saturday, 23rd January 2016

Both Sam Harris and Maajid Nawaz are front runners in addressing concerns regarding Islamism around the world. Both have also been the target of attack due to their outspoken views on the harms caused by Islamism - where a certain set of beliefs are pushed onto the population to the detriment of women and minorities. Progressive Atheists promoted the event and members attended the event.

Think Inc. presents - An Evening with Sam Harris with special guest Maajid Nawaz

<https://www.thinkinc.org.au/events/samharris/>

An Evening with Maajid Nawaz

29 January 2016 - 5:30 pm

This event with Maajid Nawaz was a more affordable affair. The event was an opportunity to meet with Maajid Nawaz and describe some of the progress being made in Australia in addressing Islamism by progressive atheists and progressive Muslims.

An Evening with Maajid Nawaz

<https://www.facebook.com/events/192527764423500/>

February 2016

Lunar New Year Festival

Saturday, 6th February - 3 pm

In the spirit of multiculturalism, Progressive Atheists participated in the Lunar New Year Festival by hosting an event in Box Hill to celebrate the occasion.

Lunar New Year Festival (Meet in Box Hill)

<https://www.facebook.com/events/846563592119010/>

Charles Darwin Day Celebration

Friday, 12th February 2016 - 5:30 pm

As Progressive Atheists has done every year, we joined with other freethinking groups, Vic Humanists, Vic Skeptics, The Rationalists and the Secular Party of Australia to celebrate the work of Charles Darwin and pay homage to the scientific method of investigation.

International Day: Darwin Day BBQ

<https://www.facebook.com/events/953670964721764/>

March 2016

Clean-Up Australia Day

Sunday, 6th March 2016

Progressive Atheists are concerned about our environment and would like to contribute towards community activities that assist keep our environment clean and healthy.

Clean Up Australia Day: Brushy Creek Trail (Mooroolbark/Croydon)

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1741219149442033/>

International Day to Defend Apostates & Blasphemers

Monday, 14 March 2016

In recent years we have become all too aware of the dangers facing apostates and blasphemers, especially in Muslim majority countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Indonesia. Countless individuals accused of apostasy and blasphemy face threats, imprisonment, and execution. Blasphemy laws in over 30 countries and apostasy laws in over 20 aim primarily to restrict thought, expression and the rights of Muslims, ex-Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

International Day to Defend Apostates & Blasphemers

<https://www.facebook.com/events/770006199799013/>

April 2016

Campaign - Combating Religious Persecution

Term 2016 has been very focused on combatting religious persecution globally. Over the term Progressive Atheists have received numerous contacts from people in need around the world, asking for our assistance in the form of sponsorship for visas, letters of support, suggestions on how best to address their current difficulties, referrals to trusted organisations and individuals who may provide further assistance and general acknowledgement and support.

May 2016

Letter to Candidates in Support of Refugees

In the run up to the Australian Federal election on Saturday, 2nd July 2016 a Progressive Atheist member took the initiative to pen a letter template highlighting the plight of refugees. The letter was published in the May bulletin so that other members could use the template and send the letter to their local candidates in the lead up to the election.

Progressive Atheists May 2016 bulletin:

<http://progressiveatheists.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/PABulletinMay16Print.pdf>

Apostasy & Atheism – Middle East & Iran

Published in May 2016

In solidarity with Ex-Muslim Atheists, Progressive Atheists published a debut article by an ex-Muslim atheist titled: A short note on apostasy and atheism globally and with special focus on the Middle East and Iran.

Apostasy & Atheism – Middle East & Iran

<http://progressiveatheists.org/campaigns-projects/combating-religious-persecution/apostasy-blasphemy/apostasy-atheism-middle-east-iran/>

June 2016

Progressive Muslims Iftar Dinner

Saturday, 18 June 2016 - 5:00 pm

Progressive Atheists members joined Progressive Muslims and friends at the East Melbourne Library to share a 'breaking the fast' Iftar meal. Progressive Atheists continues to work in cooperation with Progressive Muslims on shared goals for a peaceful and harmonious society.

Annual Interfaith Iftar 2016

<http://www.meetup.com/Melbourne-Progressive-Muslim-Meetup/events/231555188/?eventId=231555188>

Federal Election Candidate Survey - 2016

Wednesday, 15 June 2016

The Australian Federal Election 2016 was held on Saturday 2 July. In preparation for the election Progressive Atheists conducted a survey of all election candidates across the nation. On Wednesday, 15 June 2016 we sent out over 1,200 emails to candidates standing for the 2016 Australian Federal Election. By Monday, 20 June 2016 we received 116 responses.

Here are the 10 questions that we asked candidates:

1. School Chaplaincy:

Declared in July 2014 by the High Court of Australia to be of no benefit to students under s51 (xxiii A) of the Australia's Constitution, the Commonwealth funded National School Chaplaincy Program costs Australian taxpayers \$60m per annum, has been condemned by numerous professional bodies, and is endorsed only by its evangelical parachurch funding recipients and the Australian Christian Lobby. Should the School Chaplaincy Program be discontinued from December 2016?

2. Comparative Religious Education:

Confessional religious instruction provided by lay volunteers has existed in various state education acts for more than 100 years. In consideration of Australia's multicultural society which now includes an extremely broad base of worldviews, philosophies, systems of belief, and positions of non-belief, should all sectarian confessional religious instruction be replaced with a national curriculum based course which encompasses a comprehensive history of human belief and philosophical systems?

3. Abortion:

Do you wish to protect a woman's choice to have a safe, legal and accessible abortion?

4. Voluntary Euthanasia: Would you support a bill that allowed a terminally or incurably ill person the right to choose the manner and timing of their death, under strict safeguards, by providing humane medical assistance?

5. Prayers in Parliament:

Do you support the end of exclusively Christian prayers at the opening of parliament each day?

6. Blasphemy & Apostasy:

Are you in favour of ensuring that Australia maintains freedom of belief and freedom of expression?

7. Atheist & Apostate Refugees:

Are you in favour of offering humanitarian aid and humanitarian visa priority to atheists and apostates suffering persecution for their beliefs, who are resident in countries that prevent atheists and apostates from accessing UNHCR registration?

8. Charitable Status for Religious Bodies:

Are you in favour of removing 'advancing religion' as a purpose, in order to be eligible to be a basic religious charity?

9. Tax Concessions:

Are you in favour of removing religious institutions tax concessions from cults that are identified as a religion?

10. Institutional Child Abuse:

Are you in favour of requiring religious and other institutions that have failed to protect children from abuse to provide compensation?

Tick 'No religion' campaign - census 2016

Saturday, 9th August 2016

Preparations started to promote ticking no religion in the 2016 Australian Census. Progressive Atheists created and promoted an event to raise awareness about the benefits of ticking 'no religion' for atheists and freethinkers. Progressive Atheists hopes that 'atheism' will in the future be a recognised worldview in the census so that in future campaigns Progressive Atheists can encourage atheists to select 'atheist'.

Australian Census 2016 - Tick 'No religion' Campaign

<https://www.facebook.com/events/177765775932271/>

Progressive Atheists Membership Report - Term 2016

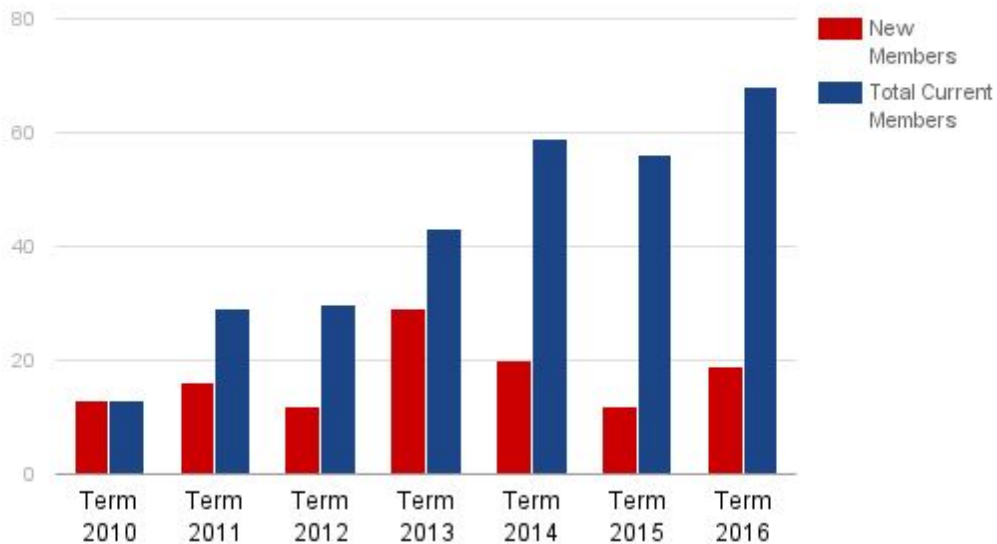
Progressive Atheists launched: 10 January 2010

Terms from 1st April - 31st March

Term 2013 has been the best so far in terms of new members with a total of 29 new members that year. Total membership peaked at 68 members this Term 2016, and has a chance to get higher again by the end of Term 2017 in 5 months time.

TERM		New Members	Total Members
2010	(3 months)	13	13
2011	(12 months)	16	29
2012	(12 months)	12	30
2013	(12 months)	29	43
2014	(12 months)	20	59
2015	(12 months)	12	56
2016	(12 months)	19	68
2017	(7 months)	3	51

Progressive Atheists Membership Data



Social Media Report - Term 2016

Website, Facebook, Twitter & Instagram

Progressive Atheists Inception

This graph shows all of Progressive Atheists Inc. activities on social media since inception. Progressive Atheists Inc. was founded on 10th January 2010.

Facebook Page Likes

As you can see in the graph below, the dark blue line indicating Facebook page likes, has risen steadily over the last 6 years since the creation of the Facebook page on 28th August 2010. The Progressive Atheists Facebook page currently has 1,579 likes, gaining an average of 21 likes per month since its creation.

Facebook page created - 28th August 2010

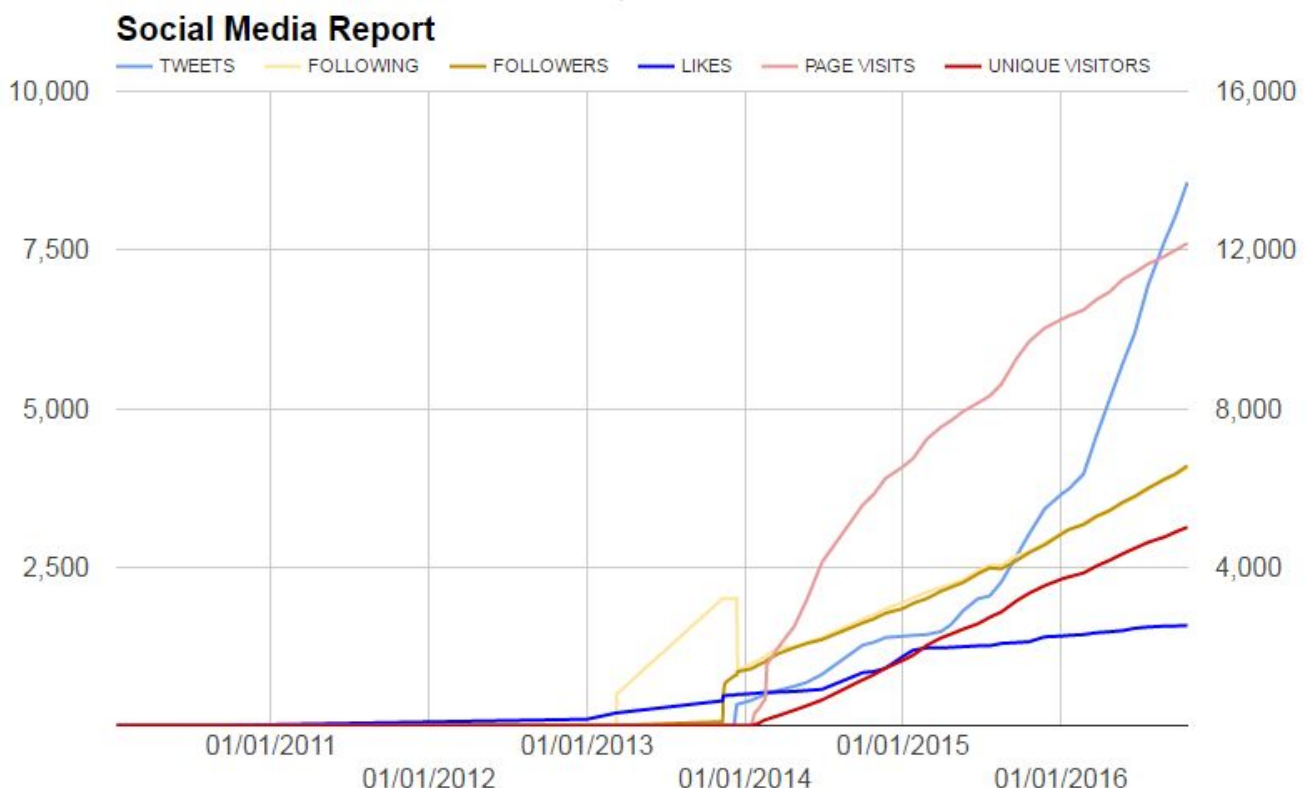
<https://www.facebook.com/ProgressiveAtheistsInc/>

Progressive Atheists Website

Although the website was created on 29th September 2012, the website didn't have the visitor counter installed until the 19th January 2014. Page visits and unique visitors to the website have grown steadily over the 2 years and 9 months since the website counter was installed there has been an average of 283 page visits per month and 151 unique visitors each month.

Progressive Atheists website created - 29th September 2012

<http://progressiveatheists.org/>



Progressive Atheists Twitter Follows

In the 3 years and 7 months that Progressive Atheists has had a twitter account we have sent out a total of 8,568 tweets. Over the last 16 months we've sent out 6,570 tweets, averaging 410 tweets per month or 18 tweets per day. Progressive Atheists has a total of 4,098 followers on twitter. We've picked up 1,708 followers over the past 16 months, averaging 106 new followers per month or nearly 5 new followers per day.

Twitter account created - 10 March 2013

<https://twitter.com/ProgAtheistsInc>

Progressive Atheists Instagram Follows

Since setting up in April 2016, Progressive Atheists Instagram has 3 posts, 6 followers and 5 following.

Instagram account created - 25 April 2016

<https://www.instagram.com/progressiveatheists/>

	23/06/2015	04/01/2016	20/06/2016	20/10/2016
TWEETS	1,998	3,656	6,184	8,568
FOLLOWING	2,439	3,038	3,595	4,069
FOLLOWERS	2,390	3,025	3,613	4,098
LIKES	1,257	1,412	1,534	1,579
PAGE VISITS	8,133	10,255	11,427	12,169
UNIQUE VISITORS	2,565	3,699	4,471	5,006

END OF REPORT