

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

- David Gillieson

The Executive Officer's job can be likened to trench warfare – long periods of boredom interrupted by short periods of frenetic activity. An order comes down the telegraph line from the Major General in Melbourne and suddenly all the troops are galvanised into action. The tasks involve statutory reports, preparing agendas, responding to requests from State governments and individuals, and maintaining our international links. During the year I have been given my marching orders several times to prepare conference flyers for the Journal and to respond to conservation initiatives on behalf of the Association.

It is clear that ACKMA Inc. is the pre-eminent body of professional cave and karst managers in this part of the world, and that we have an enviable reputation in Australasia and a growing reputation overseas. During the year I have dealt with letters and email from Brazil, Britain, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon, Malaysia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uruguay and the USA. There is also a rapidly growing interest in cave and karst resources by agencies such as the World Bank, IUCN and many consulting firms. The latter in particular have much experience in running multidisciplinary projects but little knowledge of karst and its especial problems and prospects. We need to be more proactive in promoting our expertise at home and overseas so that we are the first people they turn to for advice. To this end, I would like to put together a database of ACKMA members and their special expertise so we can more effectively deal with enquiries and enhance our community standing.

Our continuing dialogue with the Victorian Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs (alluded to by my predecessor) still continues. Changes to the Act and a restructuring and move of their office meant that our statutory returns for the last two years had gone astray. This has now been rectified. Under the Associations Incorporation (Amendment) Act 1997 of the State of Victoria, we are now required to have a dispute resolution procedure in the Association's rules. This provides us with rules in the unlikely event of a dispute between a member and another member, or between a member and the Association. An additional amendment to our rules is needed to

legitimise the position of additional people co-opted to the Committee for specific tasks. We have now drafted these for consideration by the Association.

During the year the Association and ASF Inc. submitted a joint endangered karst communities nomination to the Karst Waters Institute, Virginia, USA for two areas – the Kimberleys and Cape Range. This action flags these karsts as significant and endangered in terms of their karst hydrology and their associated fauna and flora. The hard work of putting these together was carried out by Dr Bill Humphreys of the WA Museum, drawing on his extensive knowledge of each area and its great biological significance. Ebery Hamilton-Smith was also involved in their compilation. Some very good news in mid-1998 was the inclusion of the Jenolan Caves in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Nomination. If successful this will further enhance the international standing of our karst heritage with a significant number of caves and karsts already listed. Congratulations to all those whose hard work went into this over a very short time.

We also had quite some correspondence between ACKMA Inc. and the ASF. There are a number of people who are members of both worthy organisations, and it is clear that both organisations share some goals in respect of karst and cave conservation. The first issue was that of bolt laddering in caves, part of the broader issue of the impacts of cave exploration. Ernst Holland, Arthur Clarke and I explored this issue with ASF, but failed to resolve any useful outcome. We will try to produce a sensible policy through continuing dialogue with the ASF and other cave users and managers. The second issue was the possibility of holding the 2001 ACKMA conference in conjunction with the ASF conference. A one day meeting of the joint executive would give us the opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. Despite some enthusiasm from the executive and individual members of this Association, the matter was not approved by the ASF Executive. It is clear that there are some fundamental misunderstandings about the nature and purpose of ACKMA Inc., and that we must engage in ongoing dialogue with ASF to clear the air and promote useful dialogue.