

ACKMA AND ASF MEET!

- Kent Henderson

ACKMA and the Australian Speleological Federation (ASF) Committees held a Joint Executive Meeting in Canberra on 8 October 1999, to discuss matters and concerns of mutual interest. The ACKMA delegation was led by our President, Brian Clark, and others present were Andy Spate (who acted as meeting chairman), Ernie Holland, and Kent Henderson. The ASF delegation was led by President, Peter Berrill, and included seven members of the ASF Executive.

The meeting opened with discussion of the roles of the two organizations, and while both were seen as having a different focus, it was clear there was much in common. A lengthy discussion followed on cave conservation and resource development, which canvassed a wide range of issues, and highlighted the mutual interests of both organizations.

The matter of a joint fee structure was then discussed, an issue which has been bubbling for several years. It was noted that there was a significant cross-membership between the two organizations, and that while there were organizational difficulties to a joint fee structure requiring further consideration, it was unanimously considered that the two organizations had a unique and close relationship, which both would continue to foster. It was agreed that to further enhance this, a column would regularly appear in each organization's newsletter/journal. It was further agreed that the respective Liaison Officers (Ernie Holland – ACKMA, and John Dunkley – ASF) would jointly investigate the benefits of discounted cross-membership fees and issue a report in due course. In order to enhance liaison still further, it was agreed that the Presidents of the two organizations would each directly receive a copy of the other's quarterly magazine.

A detailed discussion then followed the matter of karst consultancies, and it was noted that the ACKMA Executive Officer was in the process of preparing a skills list data base. It was resolved that ACKMA would prepare a document on its approach to consultancies, and ASF would create its own skills list data base, whereupon the lists would be melded and distributed appropriately under the logos of both organizations.

The meeting then moved onto a discussion of cave documentation and the management of the resultant data. ACKMA's main concern was access to caver-generated data by management, while for ASF the main issues were appropriate credit for the work done in collecting the data, and the security of its subsequent use. It was generally felt that the concerns of both parties were eminently resolvable to everyone's benefit and satisfaction. It was resolved that ACKMA prepare a draft protocol on the collection and use of cave data, which could then be widely circulated through both organizations for input and resolution. It was noted that the final result would not be binding on any cave-related organization or management authority,

but it was seen that such protocols had the potential to be very useful to all parties.

Joint initiatives in cave-landholder relations was the next item on the agenda. A number of possible joint initiatives were discussed, including management planning, joint submissions for project funding, and the importance of relations with private cave-landholders. No definite outcomes emerged on the matter, but further discussions will continue.

Discussion then turned to other joint actions. The desirability of a further joint executive meeting was unanimously supported. The ACKMA Executive Officer and ASF secretary would be asked to liaise on a suitable date in 2000, possibly in combination with the ACKMA AGM at Buchan Caves next June. The respective organization's 2001 conferences were then discussed, and ACKMA invited ASF to provide a keynote speaker for its Conference (which was accepted) and ACKMA was asked to suggest management topics appropriate for the ASF Conference and provide the appropriate speaker/s.

The prospect of a joint ACKMA – ASF Conference was discussed, and despite timing difficulties, it was resolved to continue discussions in this area. It was resolved that the ACKMA Executive Officer would write to ASF regarding changes to Conference scheduling to an interim 18 months schedule, with the aim to effect the conferences of both organizations in consecutive years, rather than the same year as at present. It was also resolved that each organization should have an official representative at each other's conference, to be available to represent it and answer questions. Each official representative will be given reciprocal complimentary registration.

The matter of the biennial Australian karst studies seminars were next on the agenda. The possibility of this becoming a third cave/karst –related organization was discussed. It was noted that the seminars were presently effectively organised by leading ACKMA members. The consensus of the meeting was that it may be appropriate for karst studies seminars to be joint ACKMA-ASF – sponsored and organized functions, with this to be discussed by attendees at coming seminar at Wellington Caves next February.

The final matter for discussion was the use by others of ASF Safety, Ethics and Minimal Impact Codes. It was noted that ASF had no objection to its codes being distributed and used by management organizations, and that ASF would issue a permission letter to appropriate bodies to that effect.

Overall, the meeting was harmonious and of great benefit to both parties. The need for future consultation and actions was widely recognised and seen as an ongoing commitment, auguring very well for future cooperation.