

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

– Steve Bourne

Steve Bourne (left) with Hon. Troy Buswell, WA State Treasurer, and local member of parliament – who officially opened the 18th ACKMA Conference



What a great conference the Western Australians put on for us!! I am honoured to remain on as President of ACKMA for another term and thank those who nominated me and for the support of the members. The committee returned unchanged except for Anne Wood replacing Rolan Eberhard who stepped down as Australian Vice President, and Tony Culberg coming on board as Conference Convenor. Congratulations to Rauleigh Webb who was honoured with ACKMA life membership and to Ken Grimes and Anne Wood who were made Fellows of ACKMA.

We were honoured to have David Summers, President of the International Show Caves Association (ISCA) attend and address us. I have not attended an ISCA conference so I am unable to compare their meetings to ours but I was interested to hear that small numbers attend the paper presentations. This is in stark contrast to ACKMA where most delegates attend all papers. Another difference seems to be the broad membership of ACKMA from managers, students, scientists, recreational cavers and cave lovers in general to the somewhat narrower show cave manager focus of ISCA. It would be nice to attend the next ISCA meeting in Slovakia and compare!

Look how international ACKMA is becoming – Mulu, Sarawak, in 2010 and Cango Caves, South Africa in 2012! I hope all members who have indicated they intend to travel to Mulu can make it – it is a fabulous place with the friendliest people you can imagine. I also look forward to ACKMA taking up Hein Gerstner's offer to host our AGM in 2012 after his presentation on Cango Caves.

I am sure Kent will review the conference in detail elsewhere in this journal but I will comment on a few papers. Dr John Watson's presentation on the draft karst management policy was excellent. The content is also extremely important and I wait with interest to see the final document that is adopted by the Department for Environment and Conservation in Western Australia. I was disappointed to miss the afternoon workshop that

followed with a minor health issue. Peter Sharp, Director of Parks in Western Australia, attended the entire workshop – demonstrating the commitment and interest the WA Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has in this field. Bringing karst and geo-diversity in general to the attention of conservation agencies is a challenge we have been facing for many years and now Western Australia are close to joining New South Wales and Tasmania with some focus on the 'hard' part of the landscape.

The Jenolan Caves crew turned up in force this year and presented some excellent papers. The collaboration between Jenolan and David Head of *Weidmuller* is breaking new ground for cave managers around the world. Most sites do not have the resources and capacity to experiment and drive innovation in the way Dave Rowling, Dan Cove and David Head demonstrated in their presentation. Wise cave managers will take a look at their work and the products they have developed when considering revamping their show caves.

It was interesting and pleasing to hear how most cave sites in Australia have experienced a period of growth over the past few months during the *global economic crisis*. In contrast, Waitomo has been hard hit; the majority of their visitors being internationals. Despite this (hopefully temporary) downturn, Waitomo is forging ahead with the multimillion dollar development of its Glowworm Cave infrastructure – to be opened early next year – showcased by Greg Martin's presentation.

After the conference I travelled home across the Nullarbor with Brett Dalzell and Nick Heath. What an awesome landscape and fabulous karst features. We found cave divers at one site in Western Australia that was clearly marked closed and equipment in place at another popular public site. Perhaps permission had been given to dive the sites while still excluding general public access, but a note on the fence stating this would have allayed our curiosity. I am curious enough to follow this through....

Once again, many thanks Anne Wood and her team for a great conference. Thank you also to DEC, the Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association and the Geographe Bay Tourism Association for your sponsorship; showcasing your wonderful part of Australia.



The Welcome to Country – Conference 2009