

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dan Cove

I have absolutely no doubt that this Journal will be rich with articles praising the 20th ACKMA Conference held in beautiful Waitomo, and with good cause! It was an extraordinary week, and one of the most well organised conferences I have had the good fortune to attend. All credit to the organising committee, as 'Waitomo 2013' has certainly set a benchmark for future ACKMA conferences to aspire to. Yet, running parallel to the conference, we cannot forget the tragic events that led to the untimely passing of Les Wright. Others will write more eloquently than I about Les, but it is important to acknowledge that throughout the conference the thoughts of all attendees were always with Deb in hoping for the best, just as I am sure that the thoughts of all ACKMA members remain with her now following this loss.

The conference also saw Peter Chandler step down from his position as President of the organisation, and I offer the thanks of all members to Pete for his leadership. In many ways Pete reminds me of the old saying describing BHP as "the quiet achiever". He is the most modest of men, but clearly has contributed so generously in bringing his enormous knowledge of cave management to ACKMA. I would also like to personally thank Pete for his support and encouragement, and in providing so firm a foundation for an incoming President.

I am hopeful that the next few years will be positive and productive ones for our organisation, just as I am certain that they will be demanding. The environmental and conservation movement in general, of which cave and karst conservation is very much a part, does face a challenging future with social attitudes more fluid than they were a decade ago. This poses a challenge to ACKMA; to maintain a leadership position in advocating for conservation values and to build public support and awareness. Simultaneously ACKMA's network of show caves face the challenges of transitioning economies and volatile markets, whilst simultaneously seeing the opportunities of growing inbound travel and the great underlying strength of nature based attractions. These are challenges, and opportunities, that I firmly believe an organisation such as ACKMA should confront. It is a part of the organisation's basic charter that we should attempt to influence positive change rather than passively react to it, and I am certain of the strength of the organisation and of its members in this regard.

I am also pleased to report on the first initiative of the new executive committee; a resolution that ACKMA will provide a financial contribution to the purchase of the Scrubby Creek property encompassing the Scrubby Creek cave in the Buchan region of Victoria. The property was purchased in May 2012 by the Rimstone Cooperative, a group originally founded by the Victorian Speleological Association. Rimstone Director, and ACKMA member, Nick White gave a most educational

presentation regarding the purchase and significance of the cave at Waitomo in May. Following the conference, a recommendation was raised within the committee that ACKMA consider a contribution to the purchase fund. Expert advice was sought regarding the natural values and level of significance of the area, and the advice received supported the proposal. With due consideration of the underlying financial strength of ACKMA currently, a contribution of \$2,000 to support this purchase was agreed to and authorised by the committee. All members of the committee agreed that this positive move was consistent with ACKMA's core values, the objectives of the organisation and the responsibilities of the committee as established in the rules of the Association. It is a proactive move to support cave conservation principles and practices, and a clear statement of ACKMA's position on such initiatives. The committee is now consolidating this experience into a set of clear principles and procedures which may be applied to any possible future submissions for like funding

I am looking forward to continuing to work with the committee into the future and commend them for the energy and enthusiasm that they have already demonstrated in the short time since the conference.



*Dan Cove addressing the conference at Waitomo 2013.
Photo: Steve Bourne*