

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dan Cove

As is usual, the ACKMA AGM weekend was a tremendous occasion. It was wonderful to meet with so many members and catch up on the latest happenings in the world of Australian and New Zealand caves. And the venue! A Yarrangobilly Caves completely transformed since my last visit circa 2007. The whole area, but in particular the magnificently renovated Caves House complex, is inspirational. What a testament to George and to his whole team to have achieved so much. At a time when maintenance, let alone enhancement, of heritage assets is often given low priority, it was simply glorious to relax in the 'Blue Room' of Yarrangobilly Caves House and to admire the care that had so obviously been taken with every detail of the restoration. All credit to the team – an amazing achievement and a sensational AGM venue.

As to the business of the weekend itself, both the Executive Meeting and the AGM were highly productive sessions. The Committee met on Saturday morning to consider several major issues and from this meeting took a series of recommendations to the AGM for discussion and resolution. Foremost amongst these was the question of membership levels and fees. Two issues had become very clear;

- That the current fee structure was inadequate to cover the production printing and distribution costs of the high quality Journal.
- That a viable option was now available in the form of an online downloadable version of the full Journal accessible via the secure, members' area of the ACKMA website.

With these issues came the recommendation to instigate a dual fee based approach. Annual membership of ACKMA was recommended to be lowered to \$40AU, providing full rights of membership and full access to the online electronic Journal. For those wishing to receive a hard copy of the Journal, there would be an additional annual fee of \$35AU resulting in a total annual cost of \$75AU. This recommendation was thoroughly discussed by the membership, and the amendment was proposed that the \$40/\$75 options were in fact too low. However, the motion was ultimately voted upon and passed by the AGM to be reviewed carefully over the next 12 months, given that there is no way to be certain what percentage of the membership will elect for hard copy journals in addition to the standard membership renewal fee.

I commend the Committee in particular for its work in analysing this issue and the future financial impact upon ACKMA. There is no doubt that there are compelling reasons for the review and the revised pricing structure. As one who considers that ACKMA has genuine importance as an ongoing organisation, I am hopeful that this change will attract new members, as well as ensure that the organisation has the resources to continue and to evolve further into the future.

In addition to the question of membership, the Committee also recommended the creation of a pilot ACKMA fellowship program, to be initially trialled over 12 months, whereby \$1,500 would be provided for the awarding of fellowships allocated based upon merit following a panel selection process to further understanding and contributions to cave and karst management consistent with the values of the organisation. For the initial period it was proposed that the framework be established for facilitation of an exchange style program for cave guides who could submit proposals to travel to other cave sites for learning and development based work or research. The full details of this program are to be written up later in the Journal, but in brief I consider this both an exciting opportunity for cave guides as well as an excellent starting point for what I hope may evolve into a broader program of fellowships available to anyone concerned with cave and karst management from guides to landowners, students or other professionals. The membership voted in favour of the establishment of this program also.



The Committee has also undertaken to complete a review of the rules of the association this year. It is proposed that the revised rules will be completed and distributed to the full membership a minimum of three months before the next Conference and AGM at Naracoorte Caves to provide a period for membership comments and submissions. The amended rules can then be endorsed and come into effect as of the next AGM. This is a time consuming and arduous process, and I again thank those members of the Committee who have undertaken to give their time over the coming months.

And so 2014 seems set to continue in the busy way it has begun, as we reset the ACKMA clock and begin the countdown to Naracoorte in May 2015!