

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dan Cove



It is often observed that time has a funny habit of seeming to accelerate when a deadline is looming, and never has a year seemed to rush so quickly towards Spring as this year has. In my case, this is largely due to the looming presence of the ISCA Congress, now mere weeks away. I am very pleased to note that

preparations are well in hand for this Congress with my tireless committee members Scott Melton and Dom Cove working hard on the myriad of organisational details. We are still expecting a good turnout with bookings accelerating in the last few weeks. It is very pleasing also that Australia and New Zealand will be strongly represented at the Congress, and that the number of 'home grown' members of ISCA has increased in advance of the Congress. Given the importance of certain issues to be debated during the Congress itself, including the ISCA Management Guidelines, I believe that it is of high importance that we are in a position to make a positive contribution to the shaping of these guidelines.

Meanwhile there are many cave related issues unfolding currently. Some ACKMA members may have heard of the saga currently unfolding at Cango Caves in South Africa. In brief, this saga centres on the appropriation of \$R16 Million from the Cango Caves sovereign fund – monies accumulated by the caves over many years as a source of funding for future improvement and infrastructure projects. Manager Hein Gerstner, ACKMA

member and ISCA Director, has been fighting against the removal of this vital funding in a struggle that has become a front page news story in South Africa carrying significant political implications. I have, at Hein's request, written a letter of support on behalf of ACKMA to the Provincial Government of the Western Cape. I sincerely hope that reason prevails, and that the natural and cultural heritage of this fine cave system can continue to enjoy prudent and forward thinking management.

A little closer to home (and a lot closer for me) is the new threat to the Cliefden Caves, New South Wales (NSW) being posed by the proposed Needles Gap Dam. The recent NSW state budget has allocated funds for a feasibility study into the dam which would inevitably flood the caves as well as other significant sites including the Fossil Hill site. In addition to there being genuine doubts as to the suitability of the site at all, it need not be elaborated to ACKMA members what a tragedy this would be for one of the most significant karst areas of NSW. A strong local campaign has been launched against the dam project with good coverage in local and state media. It is certain that ACKMA will throw strong support behind this campaign.

In the face of issues such as these, I am again reminded of the importance of organisations such as ACKMA that can provide a strong and relevant voice to the debate, and am grateful to all ACKMA members who are active in ensuring that the long term protection of cave and karst areas always remains on the political agenda.

I look forward to catching up with several members very soon at Jenolan for the 7th Congress of ISCA!



Top. He is not so new now, into his second year as president. A nice image of Dan from a Jenolan caves newsletter.

Left. Visiting palaeontologists Dr Lorna Steele and Dr Julian Hume and ACKMA member Cath Sellars in Starburst Chamber, Naracoorte on a recent visit.

Read more about Cliefden Caves at <http://bookproduction.org/savecliefdencaves/facts.html>.

On the website there are also links to on-line petitions and suggested ways people can help save Cliefden Caves.