

ACKMA Presidents Report

Ian Eddison

I pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land where I live, work and engage in.

Dear members,

You will see there have been some busy times for your committee on cave and karst areas. We have been planning future events, conducting advocacy work, and raising concerns on impacts to cave and karst regions.

- Future conferences have been explored again as requested at our AGM, including conversations that have occurred with the ASF president. The ASF conferences are currently planned for even years and the NZSS annually meet on the NZ October long weekend. We have continued to adapt after the pandemic. We had our New Zealand conference planned for 2022 then postponed to earlier this year. It was rewarding to meet in Tākaka New Zealand, and I encourage you to join in any of the future events that fit with your time and budget. The likely future ACKMA events will vary in scale, but we are attempting to offer some kind of face-to-face on-site event each year if we can secure interesting sites for people to visit. Online zoom AGM meetings are very likely on an annual basis. These may be in conjunction with or independent of the current plan for future events (subject to change):

2024 Talbingo, NSW (Kosciuszko karst and Yarrangobilly Caves) - 2 or 3 day event.

2025 Conference - September, Wellington Caves, NSW.

2026 May, Wombeyan Caves, NSW - 2 or 3 day event.

2027 Conference - May, Chillagoe Caves, QLD - and guide training by Savannah Guides.

2028 May, Abercrombie Caves, NSW - 2 or 3 day event.

2029 Conference - May, Jenolan Caves, NSW.

- Correspondence has been submitted at state ministerial level in South Australia regarding the development of Kelly Hill Cave on Kangaroo Island. ACKMA has raised concerns over several elements especially a lighting project by a contractor.
- There are a number of cave tourist sites conducting redevelopment following environmental impacts. We are now aware of problems with heat and fans associated with the latest lighting systems as well as certain spectrums of light causing biofilm issues and the depletion of cave fauna. You would note our website has articles on these topics, as well as in our previous journals. Please make contact if you are considering any new lighting in show caves so you are pointed in the right direction before you make your commitments to infrastructure.
- You may have noticed the ACKMA web site was down for a lengthy period due to our provider. We also had email issues for a while. Rauleigh Web was heavily involved in sorting these technical issues. Thank you Rauleigh.
- The ACKMA Cave Climate Monitoring Program continues. For those involved please liaise with our working group Andy Baker, David Gillieson and Andy Spate. I acknowledge them and those people on sites conducting this wonderful project. It is fascinating how we can demonstrate each cave is unique and the impact visitors make on our caves, as well as infrastructure like lighting and its use as mentioned earlier.
- ACKMA has made a submission on the draft Plan of Management for Blue Mountains and Kanangra Boyd National Parks; specifically on the management of, and access to, its cave and karst areas.
- A multidisciplinary working group is working in support of a plan being developed to support a proposed national park in the Hindenburg Wall karst area of Papua New Guinea and supporting correspondence has been submitted by ACKMA. This working group comprises numerous members with karst expertise from within the ACKMA membership.
- Green energy projects are currently in conflict with cave and karst areas in the Nullarbor and also at Arrowsmith WA. These are huge projects of wind turbines, solar farms and hydrogen plants proposed on delicate karst landscape. Several ACKMA committee members are regularly involved in aspects of this, and we are working closely with the ASF Conservation Commissioner Clare Buswell and a team of others. It is important to remain aware of potential impacts when projects are on or near karst catchments. This is our biggest ongoing concern currently.

- A revision of the Hills of Gold Wind Farm (Near Timor caves NSW) had some environmental modification, however is now at a permitted stage.
- The issue of feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park continues to have input from ACKMA in relation to impacts on karst landscape.
- The National Rock Garden in Canberra are to include a specimen from Naracoorte and our committee has agreed to support this and fund the plaque to accompany it. ACKMA will also assist in the cost of transportation of a chosen specimen.
- ACKMA commented on the Regis Gold Mine proposal at Kings Plains near Blayney NSW. We made the point that the risk to Cliefden Caves is real if poor judgement in the management of tailing dams and a major rain event occurs. More recently the Cadia Gold mine which is in the same catchment and closer to Cliefden Caves is currently under scrutiny by the EPA.

Participation in these and other cave and karst protection issues comes about from those ACKMA members actively engaged in them. Occasionally, we are asked for an expression of interest to take on a representative role in a working group, or we may create a working group that may self-regulate its participants. Generally, you can get involved and participate on the issues you can constructively contribute to. More details are available to you as an ACKMA member. If you become aware of an issue involving cave and / or karst that you can constructively contribute skills or expertise to addressing, please contact the ACKMA President with your details.

I invite managers of tourist cave sites to consider their opportunity to host an ACKMA conference or event in the coming years. We are working toward events of various scale each year so please contact me to discuss your cave site and which year you would like us to plan toward.

Ian Eddison

ACKMA President

