

ACKMA Presidents Report

Ian Eddison

This report was tabled at the ACKMA AGM in Takaka, May 2023



It is pleasing to be attending an ACKMA conference in person, especially in New Zealand. I submit my report to our AGM - the year 2022–2023. I value the contributions of our executive and those active members that become involved on issues.

Cave tourism sites across Australasia have had to adapt to opening with new staff and some are still dealing with redevelopments and access. There have been major storms very recently that were cause of concern in New Zealand and there continues to be recovery and revised developments in various caves sites in the southeast of Australia. These were repercussions of past fires, floods and landslips etc.

As we meet in conference in Takaka New Zealand I am pleased to say that your committee contributed \$10,000 to the Greenlink land purchase at Takaka. This is a NZSS project to secure an important catchment in this area of New Zealand.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NZSS is being sought and our template is that established with the ASF. More detail will be worked on with the NZSS and we hope to finalise this in the near future. A positive relationship between ACKMA and the ASF as well as the NZSS has been evolving. An MOU sets the formal framework for these relationships.

The International Year of Caves and Karst was extended to a two-year event 2021 - 2022 due to many international events not being able to occur because of the pandemic. So, while that event did wind up late last year, it continues to be appropriate to continue to educate and promote the themes 'explore, understand and protect' in all our natural and developed cave and karst areas in Australasia.

You will have observed changes to the appearance of our journal courtesy of the current editor Kirsty Dixon. We made changes from continuing with design by our previous printer however while that relationship was a positive one, we made change to save design production costs. I trust you are enjoying the proactive editorial changes by Kirsty and if you have contributions, please contact her. Thank you, Kirsty.

Our ACKMA web site was down for a lengthy period due to our provider and Rauleigh Webb was heavily involved in rescuing our site. Thank you Rauleigh.

Rauleigh was also involved in the instigation of our cave climate monitoring program along with the committee on that Andy Baker, David Gillieson and Andy Spate. I wish to acknowledge them and 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. This project continues and a current opportunity exists if cave tour sites that were not previously contributing to possibly join in.

Brian Clark has represented us at the Australian Fossil Mammal Site, Naracoorte Inter-agency Community Reference Group. Thank you, Brian.

ACKMA was excluded from a Jenolan Caves stakeholder group however along with the ASF we have since been involved with a Grand Arch Precinct Plan and a flood management survey. We also have commitment for ACKMA to hold a future conference at Jenolan Caves.

The Mt Etna Caves at Rockhampton required meetings to be attended and submission to be prepared. This well-known conservation battle of the past raised its head again due to further quarrying proposed by the operator. ACKMA responded and lodged concerns with the Livingstone Shire Council as well as the Queensland Government.

Green energy raised its head as a conflict with caves and karst in the Nullarbor which is huge and there may yet be other issues on other karst areas around the country. ACKMA is supportive of the green energy developments, but we need to remain vigilant and constructively help prevent issues conflicting around caves and karst with these developments. Arrowsmith is another in WA. It is important to remain aware where 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) has meant a win for vegetation cover and some distance has been gained from turbines from nearby craggy outcrops and caves.

Kosciuszko National Park required significant input from ACKMA. There have been various proposals responded to but ongoing concern is feral horses. Thanks to several of our committee and especially Andy Spate and John Brush on this.

Sixteen Legs -the travelling exhibition through Bookend Trust has now wound up. What a wonderful interpretation of life in caves this has been. Especially cave spiders. I acknowledge the Bookend Trust and the team which covered great distances in Australia to engage communities on the subject of life in caves.

I would like to acknowledge Cathie Plowman for her work on Cave animal of the year and the ASF's Cave Cricket newsletter. Both are wonderful programs. Thank you, Cathie.

Cave tourism site restoration work continues for cave tourism sites following devastating bushfires and flooding. These include Abercrombie Caves, Jenolan Caves, Wombeyan Caves, Buchan Caves, Kelly Hill Cave and Margaret River caves. We wish them all success in their redevelopments and hope these very unfortunate events present opportunities to plan and develop for the future needs of tourism balanced with future environmental considerations.

EcoGuide Certification by Savannah Guides remains an excellent training option for cave tourism sites. In particular, a plan is being formulated for our 2027 conference at Chillagoe Caves and Savannah Guides will take a lead role with the intention of incorporating the EcoGuide training for cave guides.

The National Rock Garden in Canberra hope add a specimen from Naracoorte caves and our committee has agreed to support this and fund the plaque to accompany it.

Anita and I attended the Australasian Bat Society conference in Brisbane in 2022 which was very well run. There were a few cave-connected people participating too. Over the years I have found it very helpful to my continued learning by participating in events related to caves and karst and recommend to you to join in the areas that interest you. On that note here are some important groups/conference dates you may want to consider:

Interpretation Australia conference will be held on 9 November 2023 in Sydney. AAEE Australian Association of Environmental Educators 25-27 September 2023 in Wollongong.

Interpretation Network New Zealand (INNZN) <https://www.interpretationnz.co.nz/> for some great blogs for all, not only New Zealand based interpreters.

Indigenous involvement in cave management is important to ACKMA and we aim to respectfully interact with the first nations people of regions we engage with. We aim to be good ambassadors for our traditional people's rights and work cooperatively on cave and karst issues. In addition to the Green Energy challenges, ACKMA has continued liaison with ASF on this but also the damage to art in Koonalda Cave. Media by ASF certainly raised the lack of security at the site and resulted in better protection in the future.

Late in 2022 the Australian State of the Environment Report was released, and it includes caves and karst. Thankfully our landscape is acknowledged in this critical document.

ACKMA has formally commented (neither supported nor rejected) 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 management of tailings dams and major rain event occurs. The fact that other gold mines (Cadia) are being managed closer to Cliefden Caves was a part of the advice to us. We incorporated elements from the State of the Environment Report in our formal comment. This mine has now been conditionally approved.

LED lighting is an important part of show caves these days, but we are now aware of the problems with certain spectrum of light and the depletion of cave fauna. You would note the talks online and articles within our 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. Thank you to Liz Read for leading research on this.

I am pleased to announce that it is planned to have conferences at the following sites in the future:

2025 Wellington Caves NSW; 2027 Chillagoe Caves QLD; 2029 Jenolan Caves NSW. We remain open to additional activities from time to time, online or in person, and especially on the alternate years.

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

Ian Eddison