



## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HYDROGEOLOGISTS

### **REPORT from the Vice President for Australia and the Pacific – Year 2011/12**

This is my final report to Council for the VP Australia and the Pacific after 8 years in the position. The position of VP for Australia and the Pacific is to be decided at the election in Niagara Falls and I wish the two contending candidates well in their campaigns. I have much enjoyed my time as VP and remember many Council Meetings and activities. I managed to make all but 2 of the Congresses and Council Meetings. I missed the Beijing Meeting but had attended the Reading Future Look meeting a few months earlier. I also missed the Krakow meeting – but that was for personal reasons. The Council meetings have been a wonderful opportunity to represent the region and to hear what was going on in the world of hydrogeology from an International perspective.

There have been significant changes in our region and also worldwide during those 8 years. I believe that one of the most significant changes in our region has been a decrease in numbers of academics involved in hydrogeology training and a shift towards Consultants as the only significant employer. I well recall the comment from a colleague in consulting who remarked that his company now employs more than 100 hydrogeologists! I was interested to know where these 100 had trained, as they had not all passed through a Master's course. This brings to the fore a real challenge for the groundwater community and that is the issue of registration. Have we the depth of numbers at a senior level to administer what is probably a required scheme? The number of students going through formal training has significantly reduced. I, as a university lecturer, am left pondering if my (our) offerings at university are no longer seen as relevant by the professional community; or, are the salaries on offer by the various companies so bewitching? It is certainly difficult to find prospective PhD students in Australia for the past few years.

The last 4 years in Australia has seen a significant expansion of research and training (by short courses). The Australian Federal Government is to be congratulated for providing funds to establish the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training (NCGRT). This Centre, led by Prof Craig Simmons at Flinders University, is now into the 4<sup>th</sup> year of its life and has programs in many areas of research.

The first 4 years of my term as VP were characterised from a climatic perspective, as years of drought. The drought in Australia was a major affair and it became common to have news reports about the drought! The part that groundwater plays in drought proofing was also acknowledged and there were many news reports that talked of aquifers or, as it seemed more frequently, aquifires! This level of public awareness was harnessed by some of the seniors in the groundwater community to lift groundwater investment. Your IAH VP was in the thick of those discussions! The National Water Commission had a major Groundwater Action Plan for which the NCGRT was a part.

For the last 3 years, it has been raining! Groundwater is slowly slipping from the public conscience, to be replaced to some extent by the Coal Seam Gas debate. Aquifers are now in play again, but to a

different degree and for different purposes. This time, all the resources and the investigation are almost solely in the consultant's domain. This brings new challenges as some (many) of the folk frequently involved have little if any formal hydrogeological training. Their decisions will significantly impact our environment for decades to come.

I believe that IAH in Australia is well placed to face the future. There will be the Perth Congress in 2013, which is shaping up to be a significant event. The majority of the State Branches of IAH are active and form a good reference point for the groundwater community. The NCGRT has a good chance of entering a second generation from 2014. We are perhaps fortunate to be the only professional organisation for hydrogeologists in Australia.

Ian Acworth

International Association of Hydrogeologists

Vice President Australia and the Pacific (2004 – 2012)