

IAH South Africa Chapter Report, including summary of recent activities for the year 2013/14

The South African Chapter of the International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH RSA) hereby provides a record of activities over the past year (July 2013 to July 2014):

The IAH RSA chapter works closely with the Groundwater Division of the Geological Society of South Africa (GWD) on groundwater issues in South Africa, and most IAH RSA members are also members of the GWD. IAH RSA membership provides an international perspective and the opportunity for South African hydrogeologists to stay in touch with events, publications (including Hydrogeology Journal) and debates/events outside of the country.

The Constitution of IAH RSA specifies that the affairs of IAH RSA shall be managed by a Management Committee consisting of up to nine elected and eligible members of IAH RSA. The current Management Committee members are: Terry Harck, Jude Cobbing, Angus Rowland, Matthys Dippenaar, Adaora Okonkwo, Eddie van Wyk and Kornelius Riemann.

Current IAH RSA outlook

IAH RSA currently has around 60 members, drawn mainly from industry, academia and consultancies. As always, the opportunity exists to improve this total, and better awareness of IAH and its aims in South Africa is needed. Some hydrogeologists in RSA consider that their membership of the GWD is sufficient, but many are also attracted to the international perspective that IAH provides. New graduates and recent employees of state organisations (e.g. Department of Water Affairs and Sanitation) are likely to be particularly interested in membership of IAH. The Committee recognises the need for better promotion of IAH and will be considering various strategies in future.

There is also an ongoing opportunity for IAH RSA to work more closely with the IAH membership of neighbouring countries, and this also needs to be discussed.

Recent activities involving IAH RSA

2013 GWD Conference and journal publication

IAH RSA members were on the organising committee of the 13th Biennial Groundwater Division of the Geological Society of South Africa Conference and Exhibition, held from Tuesday 17th to Thursday 19th September 2013 in Durban. This was the first time that the conference had been held in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province. IAH RSA members delivered technical presentations and workshops at the conference, and members of the IAH RSA Committee are currently involved in editing a selection of the conference publications for a forthcoming special groundwater edition of the South African Journal of Geology. It is expected that this journal edition will be published before the end of 2014. IAH RSA members are on the organising committee for the 14th GWD conference, likely to be held in Gauteng Province in late 2015.

2011 Conference Book

A collection of conference papers arising from the 2011 GWD/IAH conference in Pretoria was published as part of the IAH “green book” series in late 2013, under the title “Assessing and Managing Groundwater in Different Environments”. The book was edited by IAH RSA members Jude Cobbing, Shafick Adams, Ingrid Dennis and Kornelius Riemann, with direction from IAH Series Editor Nick Robins.

Hydrogeological Heritage Overview Series

Following on from the successful publication of IAH RSA Secretary Matthys Dippenaar’s book “Pretoria’s Fountains – Arteries of Life”, funding has been approved by the Water Research Commission of South Africa for Matthys and his team to follow up with similar publications on the groundwater contributions to the municipal water supplies of Cape Town and Johannesburg. A short film has also been made focusing on the Pretoria Fountains, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHr8urfVc90>.

Fracking in South Africa

IAH member Dr Kevin Pietersen is leading a project for the Water Research Commission studying the potential impact of hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” on water resources. South Africa is thought to have extensive reserves of shale gas in the Karoo Basin, and pollution of groundwater is widely considered to be a possibly serious problem if the resource is developed. A two-day workshop at the University of the Western Cape was recently held to discuss some of the issues, together with visiting researchers from Duke University in the USA. Fracking is almost certain to put a spotlight on groundwater resources in South Africa, and especially in the semi-arid Karoo.

Jude Cobbing

July 2014