



Australian Speleological Federation Inc.

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Information Kit 2019



Australian Speleological Federation Inc.

*Registered as an Environmental Organisation by the Department of
Environment, Canberra*

INFORMATION KIT January 2019

Dear Colleagues

For several years the Australian Speleological Federation Inc. has been concerned about the negative image held by some cave managers and others about speleologists. We are particularly concerned that the Federation is perceived, quite incorrectly, as representing mainly the interests of recreational cavers. In fact *ASF is an environmental organisation*; our primary objectives relate to conservation and environmental protection, and our Constitution makes no mention of caving.

The purpose of this information kit is to convey the facts relating to the contribution of the Federation and its members to protection of caves and karst in this country. Extending back over 60 years, it is an outstanding and quite unmatched record. Many new cave reserves and parks throughout Australia have been created or protected as a result of representations, lobbying and legal action by members of ASF or its member clubs, some of which would no longer be there to be managed, other than for the dedication of motivated speleologists. They have undertaken action in courts and the media to bring about a more informed public acceptance of the need for adequate protection of our caves and karst. Several have done so at immense personal cost to their finances, their career and their family life. Community honours and awards recognizing these achievements have been received in numbers quite disproportionate to our relatively small numbers.

In 1973 ASF was the first organisation in the world to convene a conference specifically to discuss cave management issues, and we organised those meetings for many years until Australasian Caves and Karst Management Association Inc (ACKMA) eventually emerged.

We believe that *all* cave users are cavers, and that the future of sound cave management in this country depends on a sound partnership between managers and users, on the basis of mutual respect for the contribution all can make. Please read this information kit thoughtfully. Perhaps a productive partnership might be forged between cave users and cave managers in your area of responsibility.

John Cugley

*President
ASF*

Nicolas White

*Chair, ASF Karst Fund Commission
Director, Karst Conservation Fund*

AUSTRALIAN SPELEOLOGICAL FEDERATION Inc.

Organisational Profile

Formed in 1956, the Australian Speleological Federation Inc. (ASF) is the national body representing those interested in the protection and sustainability of Australia's cave and karst environment. It has approximately 900 members, 24 constituent bodies in every state and the ACT, and represents Australia with the International Union of Speleology (UIS), in turn linked with UNESCO.

The Federation is registered as an Environmental Organisation by the Department of the Environment and Energy, Canberra. It maintains a Public Fund, authorised under the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 item 6.1.1, subsection 30-55(1) to receive tax-deductible donations for its environmental purposes.

ASF has an outstanding and exceptional track record in environmental protection. Many members have largely recreational interests but have joined the Federation to support its environmental objectives; others have primarily management, historical, scientific or academic interests in caves and karst. In all cases the Federation's policies and guidelines influence the environmental practices of all cave users i.e. managers, recreational cavers, tourists, scientists and adventurous visitors. Throughout Australia, codes developed by ASF e.g. Ethics, Minimum Impact, Cave Classification, Documentation, Rescue, Science and Cave Diving & Safety have been incorporated in land management plans both for caves and for broader karst parks.

ASF publishes Helictite, the Journal of Australasian Cave Research. One of only 4 or 5 such refereed scientific journals in the whole world, it has vastly improved understanding of caves and karst, and in turn the standard of interpretation to the public by guides and rangers.

Our Constitutional Aims

- *To safeguard and protect the natural environment, specifically the cave and karst environment of Australia*
- *To gather and disseminate information, develop and promote policies, foster and publish research, and provide education and advice to the Australian community on conserving Australia's karst resources.*
- *To bring together and represent persons interested in caves and karst in Australia and the attainment of the Federation's aims*
- *To foster speleology in all of its aspects*

Our key environmental objective

Promoting conservation and sustainable management of Australia's caves and karst

ASF's Contribution to Cave and Karst Protection

ASF has contributed to protection of the cave and karst environment by:

- Consulting on environmental management issues to Commonwealth, NSW, Tasmanian, Victorian, SA, WA and NT government instrumentalities;
- Publishing a respected, biennial peer-refereed journal reporting scientific research (*"Helictite"*)
- Developing an electronic database of over 10,000 cave and karst features in Australia;
- Cooperating with or lobbying other bodies for better educational and conservation practices e.g. Australian Geological Survey Organisation, Australian Army, Karst & Geodiversity Unit.
- Through its tax-deductible Public Fund and occasional government grants e.g. from the Natural Heritage Trust, ASF conducts programs and projects to raise community awareness of karst-related environmental issues, especially those of national or regional significance. However we do not receive any ongoing public funding, we have no paid staff and all our members act in a purely voluntary capacity. In addition, by the same means and by persuasion and example it encourages member societies and individuals to undertake practical cave conservation and protection measures in cooperation with owners and managers.

ASF and members played a leading role in environmental issues relating to Colong, Bungonia and Yessabah (NSW), Gordon-Franklin, Precipitous Bluff, Exit Cave & Mt Cripps (Tas) Mt Etna (Qld), The Potholes (Vic) and Sellicks Hill (SA). We took court action objecting to mining exploration at Cape Range (WA) and Mt Cripps (Tas) and at Timor (NSW). As well, ASF was retained as consultant on specific management strategy issues at Jenolan (NSW), Nullarbor Plain (SA/WA), Yallingup (WA), Hastings Cave and Exit Cave (Tas), Cutta Cutta (NT), and elsewhere.

Environmental Issues

In the last few years ASF has been involved in the following environmental issues:

- Formally conducted objections in Mining Warden Courts to mining leases at Cape Range (WA), Mt Cripps (Tas)
- Made submissions to land managers on karst environmental issues at Yanchep National Park (WA), Borenore Caves (NSW), Jenolan Caves (NSW), Hastings Caves (Tas), Mt Field National Park (Tas), Regional Forest Agreement process (Tas), Cooleman (NSW).
- Fenced off remnants of karst vegetation (Cliefden NSW; Canobla, NSW)
- Conducted a rural community workshop on karst on private landholdings (Stuart Town)
- Been an invited participant at an IUCN seminar on limestone quarrying (Bathurst, NSW)
- Contributed to an educational kit published by the Australian Geological Survey Organisation

- Persuaded the Australian Army adventure training school to rewrite its training manual to include a conservation policy supplied by ASF (Hobart and Kapooka)
- Co-sponsored Limestone Coast – First International Workshop on RAMSAR Subterranean Wetlands, Naracoorte Caves World Heritage Area 2004
- Initiated dialogue with the aboriginal community, including hosting a training session relating to recognition and conservation of indigenous sites on karst and in caves
- Agreed to fund an appeal to the NSW Land and Environment Court relating to a mining lease near Timor Caves, NSW
- Organised the 14th International Symposium and field trips on Vulcanospeleology for the International Union of Speleology (UIS) Commission on Volcanic Caves, 2010
- Organised the International Caving conference for the International Union of Speleology (UIS) in Sydney during July 2017.
- Population dynamics of the critically endangered Southern Bent-wing Bat, PhD Project of Emmi van Harten, Latrobe University. This work is proceeding well and a poster on the work was used as a display at the ASF Table at the UIS Congress.
- Health Survey of Bent-Wing Bats, PhD project of Peter Holz, University of Melbourne. There is now an interim report which shows that there was no White Nose Syndrome fungus detected in South Australian and Victorian bent-wing bats (*Miniopterus orianae bassanii* and *M. orianae oceanensis*). The *Histoplasma capsulatum* fungus was confirmed for caves in SA, Western Victoria and Eastern Victoria. No other infectious agents were detected which might have contributed to the population decline in both the Southern and Eastern bent-wing bat populations of SA and Victoria.
- Cliefden Projects: Geoheritage Significance of Cliefden Caves, NSW, Armstrong Osborne, University of Sydney, in progress. OSS-SUSS Cave mapping project is ongoing. This Cliefden project has contributed effectively in giving cave levels which are important for assessing the impacts of the potential dam proposals on Cliefden Caves.
- Contributed to the Saving of Cliefden Caves during 2017-18 from the proposed dam on the Belubula River in Central west NSW.
- Aerial Survey Baxter Cliffs, Nullarbor WA, Steve Milner. A paper was presented at the International Congress in July 2017 on the results of exploring the Bunda Cliffs for caves and information was given for future trips to cave prospects on the Baxter Cliffs.
- M-3 Shades of Death Cave, property purchase completed by Rimstone Cooperative Ltd in Victoria. The Karst Conservation Fund Directors have supported the fund-raising for this purchase.
- An exploration project has just been funded for Matej Lipar and Mateja Ferik to explore for caves and karst features on the North Western edge of the Nullarbor.
- Australian Cave Animal of the Year. This was launched during the ASF Conference, The Darkness Beneath in January 2019. It will have its own website and a new Cave Animal will be featured each year.

Community and Statutory Recognition

A measure of the high regard and respect held for ASF and organised speleology generally in Australia is our representation on Advisory Boards and Committees throughout the country. ASF had statutory representation on the old Board of Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust (NSW) and its Speleological Advisory Committee, and on the Karst Management Advisory Committee of NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. More recently members have been included on the review panel (Expert Working Group) for the national training caving competencies and 4 members have been recently selected to assist in the development of the Australian Adventure Activity Standards for caving.

Nine of our members have received awards in the Order of Australia honours list (OAM and AM) specifically citing their contribution to knowledge and conservation of cave environments. Another was runner-up in the BHP Environmentalist of the Year award, and yet another received a Rolex award for excellence in conservation.

In Darwin, in September 2018, Southern Tasmanian Caveneers representatives accepted an award in conjunction with TasPol and the Tasmanian Ambulance Service for the rescue of an international visiting caver from Midnight Hole, just before the International Congress of Speleology. It is so pleasing to see the relationship between cavers and emergency services being recognised in this way! Also good to see that all the rescue training conducted in southern Tasmania in the last few years is being recognised.

Dr Richard Harris OAM from South Australia and Dr Craig Challen SC OAM from Western Australia were named the 2019 Australians of the Year for their heroic efforts as part of an international rescue mission to save 12 boys from flooded caves in Thailand.

AUSTRALIAN SPELEOLOGICAL FEDERATION Inc.

Environmental Activity Profile

Included here are only those activities conducted by or on behalf of the Federation itself. Other activities conducted solely by member societies have been omitted, but these include construction of gates (e.g. Wee Jasper, NSW), cleaning of caves, demarcation of minimum impact routes through caves (Yarrangobilly, Wyanbene and in cave at Mole Creek and on the Nullarbor), installation of mesh walkways, resource inventory projects (Parks & Wildlife Commission of NT), inventory or bat roosting sites (SA & Vic) etc.

Major objective: *Promoting conservation and sustainable management of Australia's caves and karst*

Major activities	Long term objectives	Outcomes
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Liaison with government, professional & industry groups

Liaison with Australasian Cave & Karst Management Association, Melbourne	Joint action between land managers, guides, rangers & volunteer organisations	Conducted workshop at national seminar for tourist cave guides, Wombeyan NSW Presentation at national Conference of cave managers, Wombeyan, NSW.
Liaison with Australian Geological Survey Organisation, Canberra	Community environmental education & awareness of karst resources	Contributed directly to educational kit on karst & caves (compiled by AGSO)
Liaison with land management authorities	Ensure karst management issues are considered in all relevant land management planning	<p>Made written submissions to land managers on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yanchep National Park (WA) • Borenore Caves (NSW) • Jenolan Caves (NSW) • Hastings Caves (Tas) • RFA (Regional Forest Agreement) process (Tas) • Redevelopment of Nettle Cave, Jenolan • Redevelopment of visitor facilities, Cooleman NSW • Wilderness proposal for SA Nullarbor

Establish liaison with limestone mining industry	International guidelines on limestone mining in cavernous areas	Invited participant in IUCN international workshop, Charles Sturt Uni NSW to include World Bank representatives
Establish links with indigenous community representatives	Raise awareness of potentially conflicting karst resource issues in indigenous & white communities e.g relating to rock art sites, traditional sites, tourism, recreation, esp. in Northern Aust.	Keynote address delivered at ASF Conference by NPWS aboriginal liaison officer Pilot study & training course conducted on sites of aboriginal significance, Jaunter NSW. Involved with Nullarbor First Nation members regarding caves in South Australia.
Establish on-going liaison with emergency services & rescue workers	Minimise impact of emergency & rescue services on karst & cave resources, particularly during practice sessions. Produce conservation manual for emergency workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish national network at seminar to include SES & other emergency services • New minimum impact code developed for rescue workers in cave environments
Liaison with Australian Army adventure training school, Hobart & Kapooka NSW	Minimise impact of army training exercises on karst & cave resources	Army undertook to rewrite training manual to include conservation policy provided by ASF

Advocating community concerns on environmental issues

Objection to mining lease, Cape Range WA	Ensure mining activities do not adversely impact on karst values	Mining Warden's Court determined in favour of ASF
Objection to mining lease, Mt Cripps, Tas	Ensure mining activities do not adversely impact on karst values	Agreement reached with mining company
Liaison with responsible Minister	Adequate funding for newly acquired Reserves	Deputation to NSW Environment Minister re management of Borenore Caves
Future of Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust	Long-term sustainability of Jenolan Caves	Liaison with Administrator, Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust
Objection by member club to lease for mining limestone, Timor, NSW	Protection of karst & associated vegetation near Timor Caves, NSW	ASF provided funding for appeal in NSW Land & Environment Court.
Objection by member clubs regarding proposed dam on Belubula River	Protection of caves and karst at Cliefden caves	NSW water resources found against construction of dam on Belubula River.

Involving community in environmental issues

NSW Environment Trust near Mandurama, NSW	Improve sustainable use of karst terrains in agricultural communities, & improve ground water resources	Fence erected enclosing 15ha plot of limestone karst, 1,000 trees planted, report submitted, grant acquitted
NHT project, Macquarie region, NSW	Improve sustainable use of karst terrains in agricultural communities, & improve ground water resources	Documented karst outcrops; conducted preliminary vegetation inventory. Fenced & revegetated demonstration site.
Organise rural community workshop on karst, Stuart Town NSW	Improve sustainable use of karst terrains in agricultural communities, & improve ground water resources	Conducted community workshop & demonstration site inspection
Organise several seminars field trips for community & conservation organisations	Raise community awareness of urban karst issues	Produced & distributed regional Karst Management Strategy for Central West Perth, WA
Book on cave conservation campaigns 1960-2009	Inform tertiary courses & conservationists	Editing in progress. Donation received from Cement Australia Ltd.

Support for Rimstone Cooperative Ltd's purchase of Land at Murrindal, Victoria Ghost Bat Project	To manage the property's cave and karst for the long term and show to the farming community that good karst management is compatible with appropriate agriculture.	Property purchased in May 2012 and management is underway. Shades of Death Cave purchased in 2017.
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Dissemination of research on karst & cave environments

Publication of peer-refereed scientific journal <i>Helictite</i>	Disseminate scientific research on karst& cave environments	Negotiated funding, new editors & distribution of journal Volume 41 is a special publication on Australia's longest cave system in NT.
Organisation of national Cave Studies seminar, WA Production of book (aimed at what was called the “Robin Williams” level of public scientific interest) Produce similar semi-popular book summarising scientific knowledge on Wee Jasper Caves	Disseminate current cave and karst research findings Summarise state of scientific research on karst & cave environments Disseminate information on Wee Jasper Caves	Published as part of Proceedings of 24 th ASF Conference proceedings Published by University of NSW Press 2003 Published 2010

Information gathering, resource documentation

Update Australian Karst Index	Maintain accessible, up-to-date database of karst resources.	New updateable software completed Web-based system installed
Development of OzKarst database for use in the field by members.	Maintain accessible, up-to-date database of karst resources	Updating under way
Karst Atlas of NSW	Delineate NSW Karst Areas	Volume Published May 2012

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Web-site

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"Promoting conservation and sustainable management of Australia's cave and karst resources"

For enquiries, contributions and subscriptions relating to our scientific journal *Helictite*, see <http://helictite.caves.org.au/index.html> or contact the joint Chairperson, susanqwhite@netspace.net.au

Key Administrative Contacts



For a list of CURRENT executive and corporate members see the ASF website at

<https://www.caves.org.au/administration/office-bearers-and-commissioner-list>