

MERGA President's Report to the AGM: July 2011

The annual conference always seems to be the highlight of the MERGA year, and 2011 will be even more special as we gather in Alice Springs for the first ever joint conference of MERGA and the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers. The organising committee has worked hard to make this conference unique and successful – it will certainly be different from the usual MERGA and AAMT conferences, but will still have enough familiar features to help all delegates feel “at home”. Planning the conference has been challenging, but has also helped everyone to develop a greater understanding of our respective organisations and our goals for promoting quality mathematics teaching and research. We hope that MERGA members will embrace this new experience with open minds and enjoy the opportunity to interact with a diverse range of delegates.

The individual Executive reports will give a more detailed overview of MERGA's activities in the past year, so I'll focus some strategic issues that relate to MERGA as a whole. Early this year the Executive had a special meeting to formulate a draft strategic plan for 2011-2013. The plan is built around MERGA's constitutional aims; it identifies strategic priorities for each of these aims together with specific targets for 2011 that are linked to Executive portfolios. With MERGA's activities becoming ever more comprehensive and complex, it's vital to have a plan like this to keep us focused on achieving the association's aims. The plan is still in draft form, and will be revised where necessary to incorporate feedback from the MERGA members' survey that was conducted in May this year.

The purpose of the survey was to find out about members' *awareness* of MERGA's activities, their assessment of the *importance* of these activities and of MERGA's *performance* in delivering them. The activities listed included those related to the annual conference, MERGA's publications, communication methods, and liaison and advocacy roles. The survey was distributed online to all members. Responses (44% response rate) indicated strong awareness of almost all activities, and highest ratings for the importance of the conference, MERGA publications, and liaison and advocacy. Members considered that MERGA is performing very well in almost all areas. A more detailed report on the survey will be presented at the conference and published in the next MERGA newsletter, but one finding is worth mentioning here. Members reported high awareness of MERGA's roles in influencing decision makers and liaising with other organisations, and strongly endorsed the importance of these activities. However, it was clear that most members did not know how well we are performing in these areas. This seems to indicate that the Executive needs to do a better job of communicating outcomes from our work in providing submissions on national developments in mathematics education, liaising with international organisations such as ICMI, and representing mathematics education research interests on national bodies such as FASTS.

MERGA has been particularly active in these liaison and advocacy roles in the past year. We successfully applied for formal affiliation with the International Commission for Mathematical Instruction (ICMI). ICMI promotes collaboration, exchange and dissemination of ideas on the theory and practice of mathematics education at all levels, from an international perspective. Australia is a member country of ICMI, with membership overseen by the Australian Academy of Science through its National Committee for the Mathematical Sciences. In 2009, ICMI introduced the notion of affiliation of multi-national societies active in mathematics education to resolve the long-felt need to formalise links between ICMI and various bodies sharing common aims with the Commission. Currently there are five multi-national Mathematics Education Societies (including MERGA) affiliated to ICMI. Earlier this year I was honoured to be nominated by the Australian Academy of Science for a

position on the next ICMI Executive. The election will be held at the next ICMI General Assembly, which coincides with ICME-12 in Seoul in 2012.

Within Australia, MERGA is a member society of FASTS, the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological societies. FASTS represents the interests of scientists and technologists throughout Australia, and this includes people involved in mathematics education as well as mathematics and statistics. FASTS aims to have a significant influence in the formulation of science and technology policy in Australia. The cluster of mathematical societies that includes MERGA elects an individual to represent the cluster on the FASTS Board, with this role usually rotating amongst the respective societies. Earlier this year I was elected to this role for the next two years, thus bring MERGA representation directly to the FASTS Board.

Let me conclude this report by coming back to the essence of MERGA ... which is *people*. I repeat what I wrote in last year's report, that an organisation is no more than its members make it. The responses to the members' survey confirm what we already know, that MERGA is a healthy and thriving organisation. This can't happen without the dedication and hard work of many people. I particularly want to thank members of the Executive, who give up their increasingly scarce time to serve MERGA as volunteers. I hope that members will continue to support MERGA throughout the coming year.

Merrilyn Goos

President, 19 June 2011