

Chair of Director's Annual Report to AGTA Board October 2009

*Malcolm McInerney
AGTA Limited, Chair of Directors*

2009 has been an exciting and unparalleled year for geographical education in Australia. This can be safely said when one considers the work conducted by the 'Towards National Geography Curriculum' (TNGC) project and the work commenced by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on the development of a national geography curriculum. As mentioned in the 2008 report, such developments are the result of some very pro-active work on behalf of AGTA's leadership and affiliates. Our goal at the establishment of the TNGC project was to develop a report on contemporary geographical education to inform the ACARA process. I am happy to report that this goal was reached on June 30th 2009 when the members of the TNGC steering committee met with ACARA staff. At this meeting the TNGC presented the 'Towards a National Geography Curriculum in Australia' paper, supported by a background research and consultation report. It is worthy to note at the beginning of this annual report that ACARA has comprehensively used our reports in their position paper and members of the TNGC steering committee have been appointed to the ACARA Geography Advisory Panel. In fact we have been very pleased and proud that one of the steering committees members, Lucy Sorensen from the Queensland Geography Teachers' Association and he Royal Geographical Society of Queensland (RGSQ) was appointed as the ACARA Geography Project Officer to guide the process of developing national geography curriculum. Although the development of a national curriculum has dominated much of our work this year, AGTA has continued to be very active in many other fields of geographical education endeavour in Australia.

Some of this work has involved the delineation of teaching standards and good practice pedagogy in geographical education, the National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition, work to encourage the corporate sector to support geographical education, planning for the 2011 AGTA conference, networking with other teacher associations, managing the Geocareers site and continuing work with the incorporation of technology in the teaching of geography. These activities and initiatives only happen due to a group of dedicated and talented individuals. At this stage I would like to highlight the work of AGTA members who have gone beyond the 'call of duty' in their work on behalf of geographical education in Australia. Firstly, Kath Berg from the RGSQ for her amazing effort in supporting in time, energy and enthusiasm the 'Towards National Geography Curriculum' project. I feel confident in saying that the attainment of our goals with the project were in a large part due to Kath's dynamism. I would also like to highlight the unstinting work of Rob Berry as treasurer. As well as fulfilling his role as a writer with the TNGC and being the webmaster for the AGTA, TNGC and Geocareers websites, Rob has also revamped all of the payment procedures for AGTA. Another tireless worker with the TNGC project was Nick Hutchinson, our former Chair. Nick's intellectual integrity and writings were critical at the synthesis stage of the project as he provided clarity of thought and process for us to follow. Although not a member of AGTA, thanks need to be given to Associate Professor Alaric Maude (IAG Secretary) for his outstanding work on the steering committee. Alaric has been the research and thinking heart of the project, providing never-ending readings and commentary on geography to inform the process. Alaric's role is of immeasurable value since he has been able to speak on behalf of academic geographers in the development of a united 'geographical voice' during the establishment of a national geography curriculum.

In this report I will briefly report on the key AGTA initiatives and happenings, to give a context for the reader to gain an appreciation of why AGTA exists and how it is advancing the teaching of geography in Australia.

Keys to Geography

AGTA's financial position continues to be healthy as a result of the continued sales of the highly successful *Keys to Geography* publication and the publication of *Keys to fieldwork* book by MacMillan in 2009. As well as being important sources of cashflow for AGTA, both of these books provide an Australian orientated resource for schools. This is particularly important when one considers the future needs of the national geography curriculum to provide resources in the Australian context. Presently AGTA is editing the *Keys to Geography* book for a revised edition in 2010 and negotiating with the Geography Association in the United Kingdom for a UK version of the books.

Promotion of geography

Way back in 2007 AGTA began to discuss the need to look at the ways we can promote geography. AGTA has engaged the services of publicist Simone Bird who has attended several AGTA Board meetings to discuss ideas on promoting geography. At the meetings Simone has outlined a number of ideas to promote Geography and geographical education. Key strategies suggested include:

- The development of a 'Geography Brand' and a key Geography Spokesperson
- Development a central website for students
- A more rigorous promotion of 'Geography events' e.g. What Geography Is? National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition, Geography Big Week Out, the International Olympiad and other major events
- The establishment of a geography ambassadors program similar to that conducted by the Royal Geography Society in the UK.
- Identification of strategic partnerships and to lobby government

Already Simone's work has yielded dividends with AGTA being involved with John Dee's student concerts initiative. Hopefully such involvement will help promote the 'brand' of geography in the community as we work more with Simone in future months.

AGTA has also been working on creating some visual promotion for geography in Australia. Following the excellent cartoon orientated posters published in 2006 and 2007, AGTA has developed several 'message' images to promote the association and geography. The created artwork will be appearing on banners and as posters in coming months with the message of 'Geography going places' being prominently displayed. The plan is to distribute the banners and posters to all AGTA affiliates to support the promotional opportunity provided by the development of the national geography curriculum. I would like to thank Grant Kleeman for his excellent work over the years in guiding this promotional work.

Towards a National Geography Curriculum

At the October AGTA conference on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, the 'Towards a National Geography Curriculum' project was established to develop a pro-active approach to the development of the national geography curriculum by ACARA. The project has involved the Australia Geography Teachers Association, Institute of Australian Geographers (IAG) and the Royal Geography Association of Queensland (RGSQ) writing a paper titled 'Towards a National Geography Curriculum for Australia'. The members of the project's Steering Committee are:

Malcolm McInerney (Chair/AGTA), malcolm.mcinerney@bigpond.com

Kath Berg (Secretariat/RGSQ), admin@rgsq.org.au

Nick Hutchinson (AGTA), nhut1001@bigpond.net.au

Alaric Maude (IAG), polymaude@ozemail.com.au

Lucie Sorensen (RGSQ), Lucie.Sorensen@qsa.qld.edu.au (Lucie left the steering committee when appointed to ACARA in May 2009)

The first job of the steering group was to appoint the experienced and highly respected geographers, Rob Berry and Roger Smith as the writers for the project. Between November 2008 and May 2009 Rob and Roger undertook extensive consultation across Australia involving input from teachers, students, academics and other community members. The results of this consultation and supporting literature reviews and research were presented as a background report to the steering committee in May 2009. In turn, the steering committee synthesised the background report into a final paper titled 'Towards a National Geography Curriculum for Australia' which was presented to ACARA on June 30 2009. The papers can be downloaded from the TNGC site at www.ngc.org.au

ACARA's curriculum development process

In May 2009 ACARA commenced its work on the national geography curriculum when it appointed Lucie Sorensen as the Senior Project Officer Geography. The first stage of the curriculum development process involved the identification and resolution of key issues in the development of the Australian Curriculum: Geography. A Geography Reference Group was appointed in July to provide expert advice and met for the first time on August 25th 2009. A position paper was presented to the Board as a result of these discussions. In October the writer for the national geography curriculum was nominated and an expert Geography Advisory Panel was appointed. Naturally we wish those involved all the best with their work on behalf of geography teachers and students in Australia.

The following ACARA timeline will give an idea of the 2009-2011 progression with the writing process for the national geography curriculum. Naturally, the timeline may change as time goes by but at this stage these are the dates, events and milestones ACARA has mapped out for the process.

- **October – December 2009:** The lead writer will develop an *Initial advice paper* for the national geography curriculum.
- **February 2010:** National Forum to gather responses to the *Initial advice paper*.
- **February - March 2010:** Development of *The Shape of Australian Curriculum: Geography paper*.
- **April 2010:** National consultation on *The Shape of Australian Curriculum: Geography paper*.
- **June 2010:** The release of the final *The Shape of Australian Curriculum: Geography paper*.
- **June – December 2010:** Appointment of writers and an advisory group to develop the scope and sequence for the national geography curriculum. The writing to be accompanied by a consultation process for the scope and sequence document.
- **January – June 2011:** Course writing in line with the final scope and sequence document for national geography curriculum.
- **June 2011:** Publication of the national geography curriculum.

We encourage all Australian geography teachers to keep informed of the ACARA process via their website at <http://www.acara.edu.au> and take advantage of the opportunities provided by ACARA and geography teachers' associations to feed comments and ideas into the process.

TNGC continues.....

The work of the TNGC was not completed with the handover of the report to ACARA. The steering committee has now turned its attention to the issue of implementation and is still meeting to develop strategies to support the 'roll-out' of a national geography curriculum. This has included writing a submission to the Federal Government requesting funding to ensure that whatever geography curriculum is developed by ACARA, there will be appropriate and adequate teaching resources and professional learning opportunities for teachers. AGTA, IAG and RGSQ consider that they have an important role to play in both the development of

resources and providing professional learning during the implementation phase of national curriculum. However as non-profit organisations run by 'time-poor' professionals we require government support to fund much needed implementation strategies for the new curriculum. Over the next few years, issues associated with the implementation of Australian curriculum: geography is likely to dominate the work of AGTA and affiliates. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop a 'state of the art', contemporary, 'worlds best practice' geography curriculum for the 21st Century. Exciting times are ahead for geographical education in Australia!

Geocareers Website

One of AGTA's promotional activities is the Geocareers website at www.geocareers.net.au. The site, developed by Rob Berry, is proving to be an outstanding resource for educators and students, linking our discipline with potential careers. At present the major sections include Meet a Geographer, Studying Geography, Using Geography and Resources.

Strengthening standards of teaching through linking standards and teacher learning: The development of professional standards for teaching school geography

AGTA through Jeana Kriewaldt has been closely involved in this research project. The project is a joint venture of the University of Melbourne, AGTA, GTAV and the Victorian Institute of Teaching. In 2008 filming of geography teachers in action was conducted at: Xavier College; Camberwell High; Bacchus Marsh Grammar, Torquay P-9 College; and Wantirna SC in Victoria, Walford Girls School in South Australia and Gorokan Secondary College and Tara Anglican Girls' School in new South Wales.

During 2009 Jeana and Sarah North from Melbourne University have been conducting panel discussions with geography teachers across Australia. The panels have been an excellent professional learning activity and provided wonderfully rich data for the work on teaching standards for geography. This work is seminal and ground breaking for geography and I am sure will provide excellent and necessary research data for the implementation of the national geography curriculum and further national work with quality teaching in geography.

Student Geography competitions/activities

The National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition is a joint initiative of AGTA and the RGSQ and is proudly sponsored by National Geographic Channel. This competition continues to grow and be a great success in promoting geography in schools around Australia. In 2009, 87,060 students from 802 schools participated in the competition Australia wide. All students participating in the competition received a detailed results sheet and a certificate in one of four categories – High Distinction, Distinction, Credit, Participation. Very high-scoring students across Australia and winners of states and territories each received a special certificate and a book prize. The prize-winning senior students also received medals. In 2009 the school prizes were awarded to:

- Sydney Boys High School (NSW)
- Ryan Catholic College (Qld)
- Pembroke School (SA)
- Taroona High School (Tasmania)
- Canberra Grammar School (ACT)
- Melbourne High School (Victoria)
- Hale School (WA)

The final for the under 16's was held and filmed in front of an enthusiastic audience at the FOXTEL Studios in Sydney on 16 June

The results of the Final were:

First Nick Montgomery, Melbourne Grammar School

Second Tim House, Normanhurst Boys High School, Sydney
Third James Gillard, Radford College, Canberra

2009 National Geography World Championship

Australia participated in the 9th National Geographic World Championship held in Mexico City from 11 to 16 July 2009. This international contest, held every two years, is organised by the National Geographic Society. The teams taking part in 2009 were: Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Mexico, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovak Republic, Taiwan, United Kingdom and USA. Australia performed very creditably, coming sixth, in a field where the top half was reasonably close.

Geography's Big Week Out was held at Noosa from 7 to 12 December 2008. The highest-scoring male and female students in each State and the combined Territories in Year 11 or lower were offered places. Australia's team to the 2009 Asia-Pacific Regional Geography Olympiad, 2-6 August in Tsukuba, Japan, was selected from this Big Week Out.

2009 Asia Pacific Regional Geographic Olympiad

Australia participated for the first time in an Asia Pacific Regional Geography Olympiad at APRGO 09, held in Tsukuba, Japan, from 1 to 6 August 2009. Countries taking part were Australia, Japan, Mexico and Taiwan. Australia's team was selected from students who competed in the senior level of the 2008 National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition, via Geography's Big Week Out. Patrick Mackenzie (Christ Church Grammar School, Perth) and Nicole Filling (Geelong College) were awarded the two silver medals. Ikeda Yuta from Japan won the gold. Alex Lawson (Brisbane Grammar School) and Pace Huxley (Sydney Grammar School) were the next two students below the cut-off line for bronze medals. The fact that all four Australian students performed so well meant that Australia had the highest combined team score.

Thanks to Kath Berg (RGSQ), Margaret McIvor (GTAQ) and Anne-Marie Gerlach (GTAQ) for their great work with these outstanding and important student focused initiatives.

AGTA Conference 2011 – Geography going National, Adelaide

Plans are well underway for the AGTA conference in Adelaide from January 8-13th 2011. The conference is being held at Scotch College in Adelaide and is being convened by the Geography Teachers' Association of South Australia. The convener for the conference is the highly competent and enthusiastic Mark Manuel. Mark has developed a great program with plenty of field trips and classroom relevant workshops. We are pleased to announce that at this early stage, Dr Rita Gardner, Director of the Royal Geography Society in London has agreed to be our keynote speaker. Considering the experience her society and the UK Geography Association have had with the UK National Curriculum, her talk should be very influential in our implementation work with national geography in Australia. Much, much more will be communicated about this exciting geographical education event in coming months. Considering the increased profile of geography and the national geography curriculum being imminent in 2011 we are expecting a great attendance at this event (not to mention the attractions of South Australia!!)

As this report shows, there is much happening in the world of Australian geography! We are facing the challenges of being closely involved in the development of a national geography curriculum, promoting the 'brand' of geography in the community, integrating modern technologies into our teaching, whilst continuing our normal role as an association supporting teachers. Such challenges need to be seen as exciting and vital for the future of geography as a dynamic and critical part of school curriculum. Thanks for the support and hard work of all Directors on the AGTA Board and teacher members of affiliates for making AGTA a pivotal organisation in the promotion of geographical education in Australia.