



Australian Speleological Federation

Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024

Approved by the ASF Council

at the

31st Biennial ASF Conference, Devonport, Tasmania

on

3 January 2019

Prepared on behalf of the ASF Executive by Dr Steve Milner

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Document History and Status

Date	Rev	Description of Changes	Date Approved	Approved by
3/1/2019	0	Issued for use	3/1/2019	J Cugley on behalf of the ASF Council

Contents

- Executive Summary 1
- ASF Strategic Plan 2019 to 2024..... 2
 - Vision 2
 - Values 2
 - Strategic Objectives..... 2
 - Membership – Entry Requirements 3
 - Membership – Engagement and Communications 3
 - Knowledge – Sharing Information and Intellectual Property Management 3
 - Knowledge – Promoting Research 4
 - Education..... 5
 - Influence – Advocacy..... 5
 - Influence – Visibility 6
 - Financial – Funding..... 6
 - Organisational Efficiencies 7
 - Priorities 7
 - Measures of Success 7
 - Timelines 8
- Appendix I – ASF Guiding Principles 9

Executive Summary

In 2019, the ASF is the national body that represents the interests of 24 caving clubs, with over 800 members throughout Australia, and represents Australia on the International Union of Speleology.

On 3 January 2019, the ASF Council ratified the Strategic Plan in its entirety. This document is the ASF's first formal Strategic Plan.

The ASF Vision is: *'To be the lead national body for karst conservation and speleology in Australia; and to represent the interests of Australian cavers and speleologists at all levels in the community'*.

The Australian Speleological Federation organisational values are:

- We are dedicated to safeguard and protect the cave and karst environment;
- We strive to bring together and represent those interested in caves and karst in Australia;
- We share knowledge; and
- We foster speleology in all its aspects.

It is noteworthy that the vision and values include non-karst caves and environments such as volcanic, granite and other landforms.

The identified Strategic Objectives cover five areas (membership, knowledge, education, influence, and financial) underpinned by good governance, risk management and effective delivery of activities. An infographic has been developed to communicate the relationship between the objectives.

Nine key issues were identified during strategic planning, with 19 actions required to address the issues. Of the 19 actions, 5 were identified as the priority drivers, as follows:

- Improve communication with members
- Provide digital access to knowledge
- Develop a speleological research integration plan
- Develop a 5-year advocacy plan
- Approve the ASF Business Plan

To measure the success or otherwise of actions identified in the strategic plan, a member satisfaction survey will be undertaken periodically to gain feedback on sentiment and to provide tangible information during the implementation of the 5-year plan.

ASF Strategic Plan 2019 to 2024

Vision

To be the lead national body for karst conservation and speleology in Australia; and to represent the interests of Australian cavers and speleologists at all levels in the community.

Values

The Australian Speleological Federation organisational values are that:

- We are dedicated to safeguard and protect the cave and karst environment;
- We strive to bring together and represent those interested in caves and karst in Australia;
- We share knowledge; and
- We foster speleology in all its aspects.

Strategic Objectives

The following infographic shows the guiding principles for the Federation across five keys areas:

1. Membership
2. Knowledge
3. Education
4. Influence
5. Financial



Vision: *To be the lead national body for karst conservation and speleology in Australia; and to represent the interests of Australian cavers and speleologists at all levels in the community.*



Figure 1: ASF Guiding Principles

These guiding principles should be underpinned by good governance, risk management, and effective delivery of activities (refer to full-sized graphic in Appendix I). The following strategic objectives were developed across two workshops. Each topic was discussed in detail and a number of actions were identified. Following this, the priorities and their timing were identified (refer Figure 2 below).

Membership – Entry Requirements

It was recognised that the formal requirements for being an ASF Corporate member may inadvertently raise barriers for diversity in membership; an example is the requirement for a prospective corporate member to have aims and objectives that must primarily be speleological in nature.

Such requirements have been taken literally and have excluded scout groups, for example. This barrier creates an exclusivity and rejects potential individuals from membership.

ISSUE: Barriers to membership create exclusivity.

ACTION (1): Convey to the Council the need to alter membership requirements to accommodate greater diversity in membership.

Membership – Engagement and Communications

The ASF has three direct communication channels to individuals. These are paper-based (*Caves Australia* and *Helictite*), email (communications to club representatives, an all-members circulation list, and *eSpeleo*), and thirdly via the website, although the latter is passive. The paper-based channels are of high quality.

Indirect channels to individuals include those from the Executive to the Council and then to corporate members (clubs and societies).

Current communication format relies on people disseminating information to individuals; some clubs more successful at this than others. In addition, there are a very large number of ‘commissions’ who have their own networks and communication styles. Activities are generally brought together annually in the Annual Report. There is often a very large time lag.

Overall, the complex nature of communication increases the risk of information not getting to where it should in a timely manner, and the large number of interfaces which are dependent on actions of many people do fail. This complex nature of communications is irrelevant in the face of technological changes, and modern demands of individuals for effective communication.

There are opportunities to embrace social media communication strategies, to consolidate and coordinate channels, and to provide fast, timely and relevant news and information through digital means.

ISSUE: Complex communication channels.

ACTION (2): Diversify and coordinate communication channels to suit a wide range of styles; engage a volunteer communications specialist from the wider membership.

Knowledge – Sharing Information and Intellectual Property Management

There are numerous barriers to the sharing of information because said information is ‘owned’ and controlled by individuals and clubs and societies; because there are confusing and perceived copyright

issues that prevent the sharing and timely dissemination of information; because there is ‘secrecy’ justified by conservation; and because the physical library is inaccessible.

There is a move to digitise information and make this accessible to select individuals, clubs and societies, and researchers, but this is significantly hampered because of perceived copyright issues and confidentiality. An intellectual property management policy is required.

There is currently no obvious path for newer members to discover for themselves accurate information about caves, karst and conservation in Australia; with many resorting to what can already be found in the internet.

ISSUE: Access to knowledge and information.

ACTION (3): Communicate what information is available to members and how to access this; promote two-way exchanges of information.

ACTION (4): Ensure ready access to potentially sensitive cave and karst information for *bone fide* persons.

ACTION (5): Resolve perceived intellectual property and copyright issues and develop strategies to better share information digitally.

ACTION (6): Issue an intellectual property management policy.

ACTION (7): Complete the cataloguing of the ASF library and make the library fully accessible to members.

Knowledge – Promoting Research

The ASF has a role in fostering research, and has a responsibility to bring together scientific disciplines and build knowledge in the field of caves and karst environment in Australia.

The Karst Conservation Fund has a role in promoting and fostering research. The KCF is recognised as being very successful and it was felt that the KCF should continue to be supported, strengthened, and funds bolstered.

The ASF Executive recognised that the British Cave Research Association model of promoting research in the field of caves and karst is useful starting point in further developing speleological-related research in Australia. This strategic objective is closely related to knowledge and advocacy.

ISSUE: Integration of speleological-related research.

ACTION (8): Develop and approve a strategic integration plan to strengthen ASF’s role in furthering karst knowledge.

Education

The ASF recognises that it has a role in training and education about caves and karst to its members, to organisations, and to the public. Training is often undertaken by the member clubs on an informal basis.

The ASF is not a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), nor does it intend to be. However, the ASF has a responsibility to guide its members towards appropriate training frameworks / competencies where they are available.

In the past, the ASF has developed a number of widely recognised policies, guidelines, and codes of conduct. These have high utility and are regarded as being of high quality and useful as a reference point for ASF member clubs and societies, individual members, other organisations and Govt. departments. Such guidelines are in effect valuable standards, and may be capitalised upon, but currently they are not (see funding diversification below).

ISSUE: Capitalisation of guidelines, training and education.

ACTION (9): Consult with members and develop and issue a training and education policy.

ACTION (10): Develop and approve a standards development business plan.

Influence – Advocacy

The ASF has a strong role as advocate for the cave and karst environment. Historically, its role tends to be reactive rather than proactive, responding to issues rather promoting the value of cave and karst environment to protect it, or in order to head off potential threats to the cave and karst environment.

The ASF Executive noted that it has values similar to other not-for-profit volunteer-based environmental organisations and interest groups (e.g. bushwalking, friends of [place], ACKMA, CDAA, etc), and that there are potential synergies working together towards common goals when needed.

While the degree of engagement of the ASF as a key stakeholder in the management of karst landforms across Australia varies (contingent on the capability of individuals with localised knowledge), it is *ad hoc* and there is no strategic or consistent approach to engage with land managers or other influential groups.

A detailed review of current threats to the Australian caves and karst environment is required (a risk assessment), and an action plan needs to be developed and implemented.

ISSUE: Requirement for proactive advocacy.

ACTION (11): Develop a 5-year proactive advocacy plan to reduce threats to the Australian cave and karst environment by 2019 AGM.

ACTION (12): Appoint an interim volunteer spokesperson who is capable of lobbying, effective immediately.

ACTION (13): Build a strategic network of related organisations.

ACTION (14): Promote ASF expertise in cave and karst conservation to Govt. departments and lobby for participation as a key stakeholder on management committees.

ACTION (15): Raise the profile of ASF as key stakeholder and represent both members and the cave and karst environment.

Influence – Visibility

A consistent theme recognised by the ASF Executive at the strategic planning workshops relates to organisational visibility (lack thereof). There are opportunities to raise the visibility of the organisation in order to meet the vision.

The ASF brand is competent, but it needs to be used in an effective way to ensure that the ASF is always the ‘go to’ organisation in relation to anything to do with cave and karst environment, whether a membership drive, advocating over matters of importance, or being involved as a stakeholder.

ISSUE: Raise organisational visibility.

ACTION (16): Review the effectiveness of the brand, then develop and approve an ASF Marketing and Stakeholder Management Plan to maximise brand recognition.

Financial – Funding

The ASF relies on membership fees to fund its activities. A straightforward approach to raising income is to promote the value of membership and attract more members. This is a ‘given’, but will be limited by the membership growth rate.

A second important income stream is donations to the Karst Conservation Fund, which provides funding for a wide range of conservation-targeted activities; however incoming funds are contingent on the efforts of a few individuals.

This strategic plan will identify strategically important activities and prioritise them; however, there is the recognition that (a) there are insufficient funds to do everything in this strategic plan, and (b) the membership would not tolerate any significant increase in fees (regardless of the value attached to activities being undertaken).

Therefore, there is an imperative that in order to implement strategically important activities that support the values of the ASF, new ways of sourcing funds are required. Diversifying income / funding is therefore required, for example the following are possible:

- 1) Review financial objectives of Biennial Conferences;
- 2) Seek and win public grants;
- 3) Achieve donations from major organisations and wealthy individuals;
- 4) Develop corporate partners; and
- 5) Provide professional services through a network of ASF-approved professional service providers, for example:
 - a) Reference group resources

- b) Science, cave and karst management;
- c) ASFs role in training and accreditation; and
- d) Other knowledge and expertise.

ISSUE: Diversify income to fund activities

ACTION (17): Develop and approve an ASF Business Plan, including how the plan will be implemented.

Organisational Efficiencies

In order to implement this strategic plan, a number of efficiencies are anticipated. In 2020, it is anticipated that the ASF will have resolved a wide range of initiatives and have implemented others.

To support this, an organisational review is proposed in 2020; this is normal consequence of an increase in activities. Subject to a detailed review of the draft strategic plan and comparison with the ASF Constitution and its by-laws, certain articles or clauses may need to be modified.

ISSUE: Improve organisational efficiencies

ACTION (18): Review and complete an organisational review by the 2020 AGM.

ACTION (19): Undertake baseline member satisfaction survey.

Priorities

The top priorities, which are the key drivers for the success of this strategic plan include the following:

- Improve communication with members (Action #2)
- Provide digital access to knowledge (Action #5)
- Develop a speleological research integration plan (Action #8)
- Develop a 5-year advocacy plan (Action #11)
- Approve the ASF Business Plan (Action #17)

Measures of Success

To measure the success or otherwise of actions identified in the strategic plan, a member satisfaction survey will be undertaken periodically to gain feedback on sentiment and to provide tangible information during the implementation of the 5-year plan.

Timelines

The actions described in the previous section are listed in the Gantt Chart below. The headers for the columns refer to six-month periods e.g. 2H20 is the second half of the calendar year 2020. The coloured cells refer to the guiding principles (Membership, Knowledge, Education, Influence, Financial) and each cell means that an activity would be expected to take place during a period e.g. action #11 would take the full calendar year of 2019 to complete. When an action has 'Priority' assigned to it, this means that the action is a priority driver for the success of the Strategic Plan.

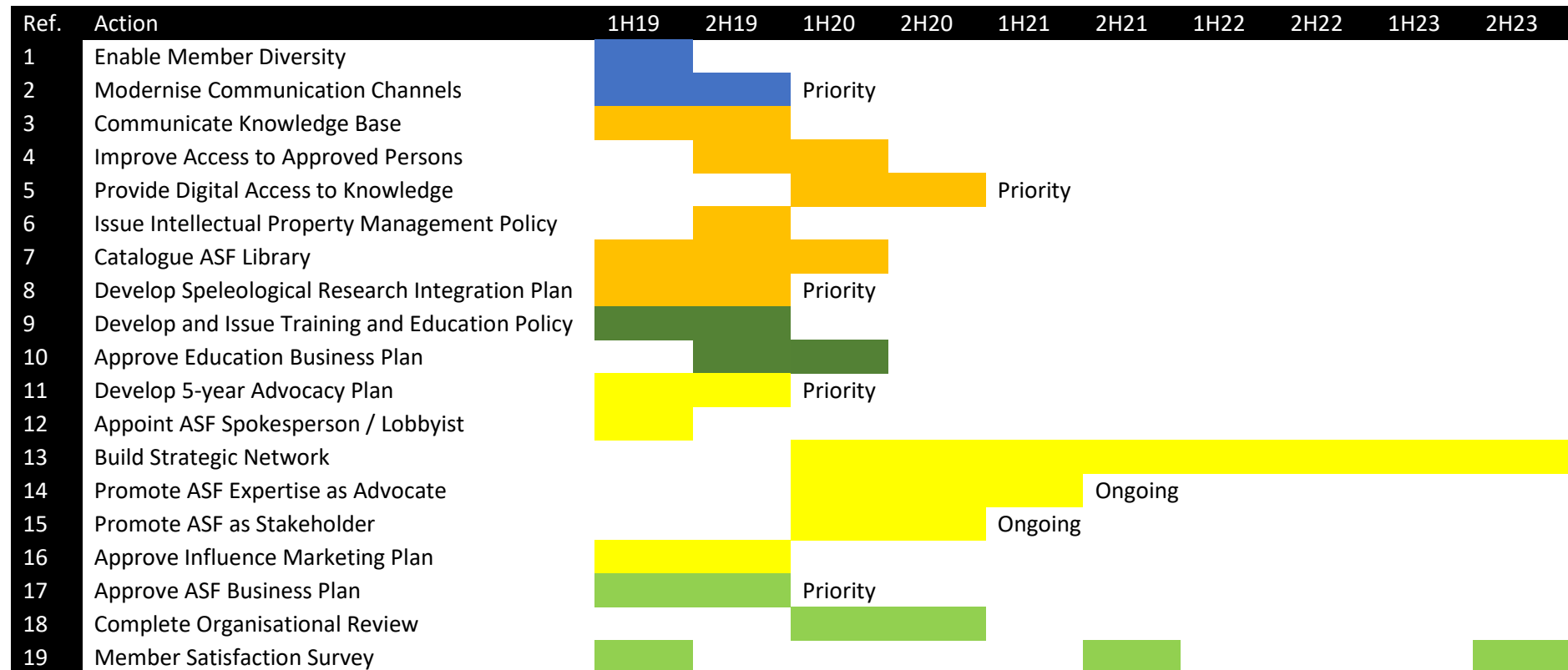
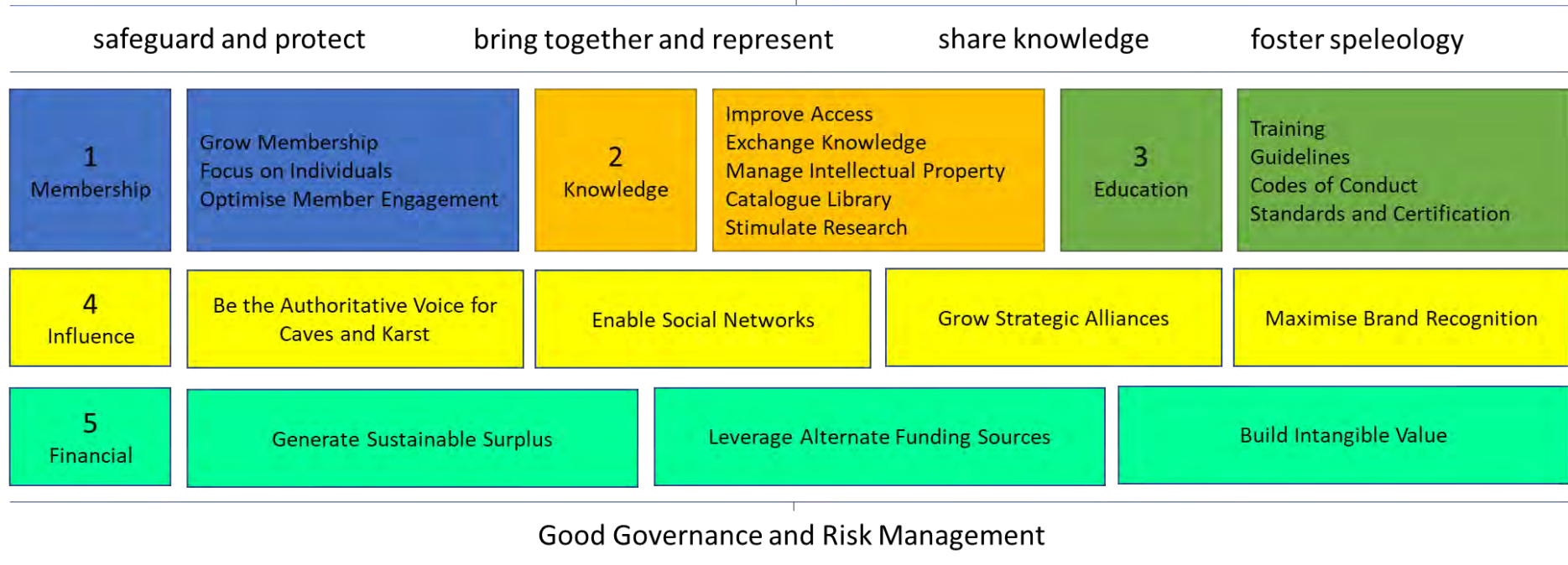


Figure 2: Gantt Chart for the Implementation of Actions

Appendix I – ASF Guiding Principles

Australian Speleological Federation – Guiding Principles



Streamline Activities to Deliver Strategic Objectives

Vision: To be the lead national body for karst conservation and speleology in Australia; and to represent the interests of Australian cavers and speleologists at all levels in the community.

