



President's column

Michael Cowling

The Strategic Review of the Mathematical Sciences took place in February. Three international reviewers—Jean Pierre Bourguignon from the Institute des Hautes Études Scientifiques (Paris), Brenda Dietrich, from IBM (New York), and Iain Johnstone from Stanford University (California)—and a variable team of local mathematical scientists flew around the country and interviewed interested people from business, industry and government as well as universities. Everything was organised efficiently, and at least apparently with a minimum of fuss, by Barry Hughes, of Melbourne University, and judging on progress to date, the review will be a fine, if somewhat depressing, piece of work. Members of the Society owe a huge debt to Barry for the effort that he has put into the review. Jan Thomas has begun the task of publicising the findings of the review, and an article has already appeared in the Higher Education Supplement of the Australian.

One of the findings of the review is (almost certainly) going to be that mathematical scientists need to do more to promote the study of mathematics, both as a tool for many and as a career for quite a few. It is clear that there are lots of mathematical jobs in the real world for the right students. A meeting involving a number of professional groups is being organised for the

near future by AMSI (and ICE-EM) which will try to coordinate better publicity for the mathematical sciences. But there will be more work to do. A major surprise for me in the interviews that I attended was the insistence by a broad range of potential employers of mathematicians that we in universities need to produce graduates with a wider set of skills. I imagine that the report will lead to a number of changes in how we promote our discipline and how we teach our students.

The Society will hold its fiftieth Annual Conference at Macquarie University later this year. This will be a gala occasion. Macquarie University is providing very generous support for the conference, which will enable it to be bigger than Ben Hur. The Program Committee are getting together an excellent range of speakers, and many stimulating talks are assured. Graeme Cohen has been working for some six years on a history of the people, institutions and organisations in the mathematical sciences in Australia, and we expect to launch his book at this meeting. This is a fascinating work, and will certainly be a discussion point. While the deadline for early registration (at a reduced price) is still well in the future, accommodation near Macquarie University is at a premium, and so members of the Society are encouraged to register soon.