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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

by  
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Well, a new year is upon us again. And as always seems to be the case, the festive season brought upon many of us not-so-festive activities.

The Boxing Day 2004 Aceh earthquake and resulting tsunami was one of the worst disasters of modern history. It was almost surreal to watch the damage and casualty reports increase in the days following, and in the end the scale of the tragedy was probably never in doubt, given that the epicentre of the quake lay just off one of the most densely populated areas of the world.

The initial media reports, perhaps not surprisingly, focussed on the events and likely casualties of the tourist areas of the region, and a key focus for the western world during this period lay there, as the inevitable personal tragedies that touched many countries unfolded.

It seemed to take a little longer for the realization that, devastating as the events in tourist areas were, the real disaster lay among the flattened coastal region of southern Sumatra. Where whole families and communities were literally wiped off the face of the earth, leaving an impact that may take generations to repair.

Commendably, once it became clear that there were grave problems in these regions, the world's disaster response agencies swung into action, and we have seen a response on a magnitude not seen for many years, if ever.

Australia's contribution was commensurate with its economic and geographic position. The Australian Defence Force was at the forefront of the response, both in terms of actual ADF deployments and in terms of the provision of both leaders and staff for the civilian disaster response. The military demonstrated that once again it has the capacity to both provide and train the elements of health disaster capability.

The affected region of the Indian Ocean must now, with our help, rebuild itself. In so doing, it can only be hoped that the leaders of our region will not avoid the requirement to warn, protect, plan and prepare for these types of disasters. Work has started in this area, but it must be completed and sustained.

**CONFERENCE 2005**

The Association's annual scientific conference will be held in Launceston, Tasmania, from 14 to 16 October 2005. Planning is well underway for this event, which promises to be hugely successful, as are all our conferences.

This year AMMA is working to develop a joint conference concept with the Australasian College of Tropical Medicine. Because of our region of interest, tropical medicine is a key factor in military operations and a key interest area for military medicine. A joint conference will help to enhance the Association's focus in this area and will offer mutual benefits to both AMMA and ACTM.

The venue is the Grand Chancellor, situated in the heart of the city, and only a short walk from the many attractions of the area, including the Gorge, the Penny Royal Mill, the Queen Victoria Museum and the James Boag Brewery: Launceston is also a stepping stone for tours of northern Tasmania and the central highlands region.

Travel to Launceston can be conventional by air or, for those wanting a little bit more adventure (or pining for their younger days!), by sea, with the "Spirits" providing services to Devenport from both Sydney and Melbourne. As did our last conference in Tasmania, this one offers the opportunity to build a holiday around the academic activities.

Of course, it will not all be beer and skittles. Two days of papers will be preceded by a workshop and tour at the Australian Maritime College.

Make sure that you pen these dates in your diary, and please sharpen your pencils to write those all important papers that make our conferences the success they always are.

I look forward to seeing you there.