

## **Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers' Medal 2009**

The Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers' Medal is offered annually to the most outstanding index to a book or periodical compiled in Australia or New Zealand.

This year eight entries for the medal were received. The entries came from indexers in four Australian States or territories and from New Zealand. One extensive name index was excluded from detailed consideration, on the grounds that it did not provide scope for the indexer to demonstrate expertise in analysing and expressing complex subject relationships.

The judges considered seven substantial and high quality indexes as candidates for the medal. All were of sufficient length to deal with complex subject matter, and showed a grasp of the language appropriate to the texts, some of which were scientifically or culturally highly specialised. All showed the indexers' ability to match the text with readers' vocabulary.

In awarding the medal, the judges look for an index which goes beyond being competent, or even impeccable for its particular purpose. The important word in the requirements is "outstanding". We look for an index in which the indexer faced difficult challenges and met them in an elegant and admirable manner.

This year the judges found such an index in a remarkable reference work, entitled *A handbook of Aboriginal languages of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory*, by Jim Wafer and Amanda Lissarague, published in 2008.

The book is the culmination of a large collaborative project, and was inspired by the linguistic partnerships forged between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people over the last 200 and more years. It provides a guide to the Aboriginal languages of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, and to the current state of information about them. One aim is to show which dialects belong together as variant forms of the same language, and which languages belong together as related members of a group; another aim is to provide information about the current state of these languages, and a guide to resources available for language revitalisation, including a bibliography. The chapters include a geographical sequence, as well as information on contact languages, sign languages, terms used in kin classification, and placenames. There is a word-list for each language, with an account of the sources used in compiling it, and an overview of the language's phonology. It is a thorough, carefully organised, well edited and beautifully produced reference work, assembling in over 800 pages a tremendous quantity of information.

The challenges facing the indexer of such a work are considerable. The index aims to help users find information quickly about specific languages, as well as about the people and groups working on those languages, and the main communities where those languages are or were spoken. Users can search for a language either by name or by location, and the index must therefore include not only the preferred spelling of all the

language names, but also many alternative spellings; users who know at least one of the various ways a language's name has been spelled, including English names for the languages, can find the index entry for the language. Users unsure of the language name or its spelling can search by location, with the help of a map, if necessary.

The index uses a number of devices to help users. There is a long introductory note to the index, which may appear daunting to first-time, non-specialist users, but is in fact extremely clear and helpful. Typographical devices, such as bold type and italics indicate the main entries for a language or language group, the page numbers for the word-list for the language, and for the principal entry for kin classification terminology of any language, as well as the location of relevant maps.

While the names of languages and locations are prominent in the 29-page index, it also includes a great deal of detailed subject analysis, particularly in the sub-headings. This is a complex index to a complex reference text, yet it is easy for non-specialists to use and find relevant information.

The judges were impressed by the introductory notes to the index, the use of bold and italic type for special features, the excellent subject analysis and the cross-referencing. Overall, the manner in which the index interacted with the book demonstrated the considerable thought the indexer has put into it. The book is likely to be used largely from the index, and the functionality is very high. The judges are therefore pleased to award the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers Medal for 2009 to the indexer of this work, Frances Paterson.

The Society also congratulates the publisher of this well edited and beautifully produced book, Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, of Nambucca Heads, NSW, which publishes dictionaries, grammars and language learning materials on Aboriginal languages. Proceeds from sales contribute to Muurrbay's publishing activities and language revitalisation programs. We recognise the effort that a small publisher must make to produce such a large and complex reference book and to support and maintain such high standards of production, editing and indexing. We are pleased to present the publisher with a certificate to mark its association with this medal-winning index.

The panel of judges this year consisted of Alan Walker, indexer (convener); Garry Cousins, indexer and librarian; and Dr Jeremy Fisher, Executive Director of the Australian Society of Authors, an experienced compiler, editor and user of indexes. All three judges are previous winners of the Medal.