

A WORD FROM THE TECHNICAL PROGRAM CHAIR

A great deal of important activity goes on in a conference like ICSLP during tea and coffee breaks, around tables at lunch and dinner, and on later into the evenings in local hostleries. But the technical and scientific program is important too, and of course without it, the conference would not exist.

Planning a conference in Australia is always somewhat like crystal-ball gazing: the distances and consequent costs involved for most potential delegates make it very hard to predict the likely numbers of submissions. We were pleasantly surprised, then, by the extremely strong worldwide response to the Call for Papers; married with the high-quality assessment of the reviewers, this has allowed us to put together a proceedings that contains in excess of 800 papers to be presented at the conference, either in oral sessions or poster sessions. Space and time constraints mean that only just under half of the accepted papers could be presented orally. The reviewing process involved a very large number of people across the globe, structured into 25 topic area teams managed in each case by an Area Moderator (typically outside of Australia) and an Area Organiser (typically in Australia); this structure often meant that someone was available to resolve issues at any time of day or night.

For this ICSLP, we made a very conscious attempt to bring to the conference those who work with the computational processing of aspects of language beyond the consideration of speech itself: to this end, our call for papers contained a number of topic areas which have resulted in the various sessions that happen on the first day of the conference, thus overlapping with the International Symposium on Spoken Dialogue. We are also very fortunate to have two internationally distinguished researchers in aspects of spoken language processing as our plenary speakers: Professor Graeme Clark, the leader of the Australian Bionic Ear project, and Dr Stephanie Seneff, a major player in speech processing in the US. A third plenary session is given over to a topic which we are sure will strike a chord with many present at the conference: in a time when increasingly powerful speech processing products are appearing on the desktop, research funding bodies are questioning the need to continue funding work in speech recognition, with some in the US and Europe taking that view that speech is a "solved problem". Our panel aims to examine and strengthen the robustness of the arguments that we might make to the contrary.

Assembling a program of this size is no simple task. As already noted, the Technical Program Committee have been helped immeasurably in this by the 25 topic area teams that made up the Scientific Review Committee; as a small recognition of their considerable effort, their names are listed elsewhere in this volume. As chair of the Technical Program Committee, my job was made so much easier by the cooperation of these individuals, but also in particular by the other members of the TPC who invested many long hours in putting together the conference. Roberto Togneri was responsible for arranging the plenaries, as well as managing the huge operation of ensuring that all 1100 summaries ended up with the most appropriate reviewers; Denis Burnham and Michael Wagner carried out the vast logistical exercise of shoehorning all the papers into the available sessions, minimising conflicts and ensuring that those speakers who were presenting more than one paper did not have to be in two places at once. Invaluable administrative help was provided by Debbie Whittington and Philip Chan at the Microsoft Research Institute in Sydney. As is so often the case, the hard work behind the scenes is invisible; but without the help of all these people, this technical program would not have been possible.

Robert Dale
(Chair of Technical Program Committee)