

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

22nd Annual Meeting of the ANZSCDB at Combio2003,
Wednesday 1st October, 2003, 17:50 pm, Corryong Rooms 4&5
Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre.

This is my first year as ANZSCDBI president, having taken over from former president Tim Cox. I would like to formally thank Tim for his efforts on behalf of the society, both in his role as President and continuing as Immediate Past President. He has helped focus my mind on the task of identifying Society needs and has offered a considerable amount of his time recently on rebuilding and maintaining the website.

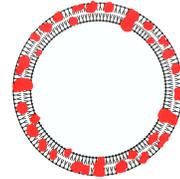
I have assembled a minimal cabinet, consisting of Graham Lieschke (Ludwig Institute) as Vice President and President-Elect, and Duncan Sparrow (Victor Chang Institute) as Treasurer. I have dispensed with the services of Shearman Office Support, who were our previous secretariat. These duties have now been taken on by myself and Duncan Sparrow, with in kind help from the Victor Chang Institute by way of support from one of its secretaries, Rose Amante. There were ongoing communication issues with Shearman that lead to frustration, inaccurate documentation of current members and wasted time. The new arrangement is more efficient and will save the Society some \$10,000 annually in secretariat and newsletter printing costs, which can be distributed back to members' benefits. This year, the gain went largely towards paying for the minting of the President's Medals at a cost of some \$8,700. For subsequent years, the savings should translate directly into more support for meetings and individual members. For a small society such as ours, a professional secretariat is probably unnecessary and overly expensive, and now that our own members' databases are established, they are relatively easy to maintain and it should be convenient for future Presidents to continue this practice for some years ahead.

An additional administrative change implemented this year has been a move to distribute the thrice-yearly newsletter electronically as a pdf file. This has allowed us to increase its size and importantly its content, for example through the implementation of a "profiles" series highlighting the work of selected members, without incurring additional printing expenses. We can also use colour more liberally. So far the feedback has been almost exclusively positive, although a few have had trouble with their local servers that will not handle files of greater than 1Mb. This has been solved by sending black and white versions electronically. I feel that this change is a positive one that is consistent with modern practices, saves paper, and saves the Society a considerable amount of money. Hopefully, the newsletter is still read as widely as before. Whether the move has anything to do with the downturn in corporate advertising in the newsletter (see Treasurer's Report), will require some further research. The newsletter continues to serve as a vehicle for dissemination of news and information to our members.

The Executive has worked towards retaining and attracting members to the Society and I am delighted to report that membership has reached an all-time high, around 240 at the time of writing this report. Retention of the membership level achieved by Tim Cox in 2002, together with a healthy profit from Combio2001 of some \$8,000 incoming, has allowed us to maintain our level of activity in supporting cell and developmental biology in this country. Activities have been balanced so as to achieve a healthy budget position at the end of the financial year, as reflected in the Treasurer's Report.

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**AUSTRALIA &
NEW ZEALAND
SOCIETY
for
CELL &
DEVELOPMENTAL
BIOLOGY
INCORPORATED**



The standard activities of the Society have continued over the last year. We continue to support our representative government lobbying groups, ASMR (Australian Society of Medical Research) and FASTS (Federation of Scientific and Technological Societies). We contributed specifically to the ASMR Australian Case Studies, an initiative of placing a series of short biographies of individual scientists in glossy format on the desks of politicians to remind them of the returns to this country from medical research. We also continue to support Science Meets Parliament Day, run by FASTS, on an ongoing basis. Since the passing through parliament this year of the embryonic stem cell bills (Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002 and Research Involving Embryos Act 2002), the activities of the new lobbying body CAMRA (Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research Australia) appear to have died down and our own need to be active in this area has also diminished. Nevertheless, we are monitoring the progress of the National Stem Cell Centre that has been formed as an Australian Biotechnology Centre of Excellence with a supporting Major National Infrastructure Grant. After a shaky start, the Centre seems to have the support of the relevant government departments and stakeholder institutions and funding for stem cell research should start flowing in the remaining months of this year. The vision for the Centre is to strategically support both basic and outcomes-oriented stem cell research, thus strengthening our research culture and supporting the activities of some of our Society members. Perhaps the most important approaching political landmark is the end of the first period of the doubling of the NHMRC budget under the Wills Report. ASMR is engaging in a number of strategies to ensure a long-term future for medical research in Australia, including commissioning an independent economic analysis of the expenditure and economic returns of medical research. We should continue to support their activities in whatever way possible as we head towards the crucial 2004 budget. The Society has supported talk and poster prizes at Combio, the Combined Biological Sciences Meeting in WA, and the Hunter Cell Biology Meeting in NSW. It has also supported the Australian and New Zealand Zebrafish Workshop on Waiheke Island in NZ and the Boden International EMT Conference in Port Douglas. Numerous student travel awards were given for Combio and two awards to attend the Australian Developmental Biology Workshop under the Student Exchange Scheme have also been granted.

The second President's Medal will be presented at Combio2003 to Professor John Kerr and I am grateful to the senior members of the Society for helping me choose the recipient. Professor Kerr was a pathologist and in the 1960s and 70s played a key role in the discovery of programmed cell death and its definition as a normal developmental and homeostatic mechanism. He laid the foundations for the molecular work that followed in Australia and overseas that led to the discovery of Bcl2 and other key cell death pathway proteins, and a Nobel award to Robert Horvitz in 2002. The award will help to develop a higher profile for the Society and I am delighted to report that we have secured significant sponsorship for this and next year's award from Sigma-Aldrich.

Two other major Society events are in the planning stage. The first is the staging of the 15th International Society of Developmental Biologists Congress in Sydney in 2005. I have the honour of being the convener of that meeting. This meeting will bring a large number of the world's best developmental biologists to Australia and I hope to make it a unique event. Certainly, the bar has been set very high by the quality of the International Genetics Congress held this year in Melbourne, with Dr Philip Batterham as convener. There is also a plan to form an Asia/Pacific Society or Network of Developmental Biologists, with its first meeting to be held at the ISDB Congress in 2005. The plan is to run the AP Society out of the RIKEN Centre for

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Developmental Biology in Kobe with Masatoshi Takeichi as inaugural President. This initiative, if it comes to fruition, will represent a significant opportunity to get to know our Asia/Pacific developmental biology colleagues with a view to joint meetings, exchanges of students and postdoctoral fellows, and scientific dialogue. I propose that we throw our full support behind this venture and Rob Saint and I will be working with Professor Takeichi as they move forward in defining the statutes and structure of the Society.

I would like to express my thanks to members of the Executive for their efforts during the past year, particularly Duncan Sparrow who has developed and maintained the membership databases and efficiently assisted in running the Society beyond his duties as Treasurer. Also to Rose Amante for her secretarial assistance, Tim Cox for the considerable undertaking of rebuilding and maintaining the website, as well as offering advice and serving as a sounding post, State Representatives for their local efforts, and all those members who have contributed to the newsletter and importantly to the running of the superb Combio series.

Richard P. Harvey
President

Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology Incorporated.
October 2003