

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

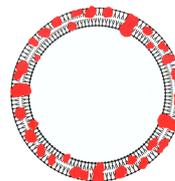
24th Annual Meeting of the ANZSCDB at ComBio2005

28th September, 2005

Adelaide Convention Centre

My first year as President of ANZSCDB has been an interesting experience, one that I would not have managed without the support and ongoing help of the previous President, Richard Harvey. This is an opportunity to formally thank Richard for his contribution to the Society during his time as President. He saw the society through a period of growth in membership and was responsible for implementing several initiatives that have greatly enhanced the Society's national and international profiles.

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Society business this year has been managed by consensus decision making by a core Executive comprising myself, the Vice President (Alpha Yap), Secretary (Jason White), Treasurer (Heather Verkade), and Immediate Past President (Richard Harvey). State reps were involved in decision processes such as the selection of Travel Grant recipients, and there were occasional opportunities for State Reps to represent the Society. I thank you all for your input. With secretarial and information technology support from the Ludwig Institute, we maintained electronic communication as the major basis of Society communications, providing an edited and curated relay of notices of relevance to Society members via the President's desk.

The Society's **web page** owes much to Tim Cox, who is retiring now from his role as Society Webmaster. Tim was instrumental in setting up the current highly professional webpage, and has provided ongoing services to maintain it. Thanks, Tim, for this contribution. I am pleased to advise that Jason White has agreed to take over this role. An immediate goal will be to review webpage content, ensure that it remains up-to-date in real time, and implement management processes to facilitate its use as an up-to-date source of society information.

The **Newsletter** has been continued in its electronic format, with an Autumn issue circulated in March, and a Spring issue "in press" for imminent circulation. A Summer issue is anticipated which will be a bumper issue for meeting reports. With the regular e-mail notice service, the purpose of the Newsletter has evolved away from the "noticeboard" function it served originally, and the content is now more one of record, information, interest articles, and information from sustaining members. The professionalism of the Newsletter this year is the achievement of our Newsletter Editor, Ben Hogan, who relinquishes this role at the end of the year, and I am pleased to advise that Geraldine O'Neill has agreed to assume this role.

Despite circulating a string of membership prompts, including a specific reminder to the non-renewing members, our **membership base** has fallen this year to 230 members (down from 271 in 2004 and 238 in 2003). Details of the membership profile are summarised in the Treasurer's report. Although disappointing, several observations are relevant here:

- There has been poor retention of student members beyond their first “free” year. Of 58 “free” memberships in 2004, 47 have lapsed (20 are WA students who are unlikely to renew because they joined in the context of Perth ComBio2004 registration), 11 retained membership.
- There is a somewhat surprisingly low number of new students taking up “free” membership option. Of 39 new members, 20 are students, 12 of these are the “free” package. I think it is likely that there are far more than 20 new students across all our membership, and encourage all Society members to draw the Society to their students’ attention, to utilise the opportunity of membership to teach their students to value scientific community participation, and to encourage students to maintain their membership beyond year 1 (this year 5 students have renewed membership, 8 have not). A major component of the Society’s activity portfolio is directed at student support and we have the resources for the student-support programs to be more active, particularly under the Student Exchange Scheme.
- The multi-year membership package has possibly created a “cumulative” effect which has supported membership numbers over the past 3 years without annually testing commitment and engagement. Conversely, we note that next year is the first year that we will be vulnerable to losing members from the multi-year package which started in 2003.

The Society actively supports scientific intercourse in the Australian research community through its direct and indirect financial support of **Australian meetings**:

- Our members are involved in the organization of the April **Hunter Cellular Biology Meeting** and we have the mandate to strengthen and formalise our relationship with this meeting in forthcoming years. We provide sponsored talk/poster awards(s) at this meeting.
- We were the host society for the **15th International Society of Developmental Biology Congress** this year, held in Sydney in September. The Organising Committee comprised our members Richard Harvey, Peter Currie and Sally Dunwoodie, and the great success of this meeting was a credit to them and reflected well on the Australian biomedical research community. Congratulations to them for their superb job. The Society contributed financially as a symposium sponsor (\$2000), and we ran what I believe to be our largest-ever programme of Travel Grants, supporting 7 members, one from each state/region. Great care was taken to manage the selection process transparently and equitably, and the recipients included student, junior career and early independent career investigators. Overall, our direct financial commitment relating to this meeting will approach \$9,000; in the absence of an explicit Society policy, the Executive believed that committing approximately 12% of our assets toward this major international meeting was appropriate.
- The **ComBio meeting** remains our flagship society-sponsored meeting. This year’s meeting includes celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of ASBMB, and I have forwarded Phillip Nagley (ASBMB President) a letter of congratulations from ANZSCDB. Our members Michael Lardelli initially and then Stephen Gregory and Joy Rathjen joined the ComBio organising Committee this year, and we thank them for their efforts. The participation of ANZSCDB members in this year’s meeting is considerably lower than in previous years; approximately 50% of last year, and comprising only about 8% of total

registrants. I believe this is a once-off dip, consequent to the meeting falling so close to the ISDB Congress, and the impact of participation of our members in the Congress on the residual funds available within laboratories for local travel. None-the-less, ComBio2005 promises an interesting programme for the disciplines we represent for those attending. The reduced participation will impact significantly on the Society's profit-share and we can plan on a reduced income from this source in this budget cycle. Alpha Yap and Helen Cooper are representing us on the Organising Committee for ComBio2006 in Brisbane, and I encourage our membership to support next year's meeting whole-heartedly. At this AGM the Society is being asked to endorse its commitment to this meeting in the medium term. In this context, discussion with ASBMB about the issue of sustaining membership and the possible separation of the value of the ComBio exhibition licence from the society-specific value has been initiated.

- We have decided to trial involvement in the ASMR-organised **Australian Health and Medical Research Congress 2006** in Melbourne as a Symposium Society for an outlay of \$2000, recoverable if the meeting makes a profit. This will enable us to increase our profile in the Health and Medical Research community. Rob de Iongh is our AHMRC meeting representative.
- The society encourages boutique Australian meetings organised by its members through a seed-grant funding programme. This year, the **Cairns Drosophila meeting** was supported through this channel. The intent of this program is to support meetings held in Australia, particularly at their start-up, and it is not intended to support off-shore meetings, or to provide ongoing support for annual meetings.

Regular activities of the Society have continued. We maintain our relationship with the peak government lobby groups ASMR (Australian Society of Medical Research) and FASTS (Federation of Scientific and Technological Societies). CAMRA (Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research Australia) collects data and lobbies on stem cell issues, to which we have lent our affiliation in name, but declined to take up an option to provide financial support. A very important current issue is the campaign, spear-headed by ASMR, to place increased NHMRC funding for research on the agenda for the 2006 Federal budget. With the conclusion of the implementation of the first cycle of Wills Report recommendations that has doubled NHMRC funding, research funding is now capped unless a policy decision is implemented to increase it; without this, the value of grants and or number of successful grants will inevitably decrease. A request for a grass-roots letter-writing campaign is current now, and I encourage you to write individually to relevant politicians in the next week or so if you have not already done so. We supported the participation of a member at the FASTS-organised annual Science Meets Parliament day in March (a report is in the forthcoming newsletter). This year we formalised our membership of the International Society of Developmental Biology, I attended the recent Board meeting in Sydney, and we now have formal representation on their Board (Rob Saint was confirmed at the recent ISDB AGM). The ISDB-initiated APNDB (Asia-Pacific Network of Developmental Biologists) has been formally convened; Rob Saint is our representative and President-elect. The APNDB currently provides a web-page for information exchange but has limited resources, but it will be potentially of great benefit to our regional developmental biology community if it can

bring additional resources to facilitate international scientific exchange and co-operation in our region.

It will be my pleasure to present the **4th President's Medal** to Professor Peter Koopman. Prof Koopman has made significant contributions in the area of mammalian sex determination, particularly as part of the team that discovered the Y-chromosomal sex-determining gene *Sry*, considered one of the most important breakthroughs in molecular genetics of the 20th century. His group discovered and characterisation of several SOX gene family members that have provide insights into other important developmental processes. Prof Koopman is author of more than 130 papers, including 4 in *Nature*, 7 in *Nature Genetics*, and others in *Cell*, *Genes and Development*, *Development* and *Developmental Cell*, which together have been cited over 5000 times. He is on the editorial board of several international journals including *Developmental Dynamics* and *Nature Reviews Genetics*. Prof Koopman received the AMP Queensland Biomedical Research Award in 1992, the Julian Wells Medal in 1998, and the Amersham-Pharmacia Biotech Medal in 2003. He is an ARC Australian Professorial Research Fellow and a member of the ARC College of Experts. His medalist's lecture "A Journey of Sexual Discovery" will be presented on Wednesday 28th September. We are again very grateful to Sigma Aldrich for their generous sponsorship of this award since its inception, and renewed last year for 2005-6.

The Society is in a healthy **financial position** as outlined in the Treasurer's report, and I consider it to be a major objective for the coming year to again deploy a proportion of these assets for the benefit of the membership. In particular, we have an endorsed mandate to implement a second society medal to recognize excellent research achievement by our members, and I am determined to bring this idea to fruition during my term.

I conclude reiterating **thanks** to Executive members particularly: Jason White who has maintained the membership database and taken on an increasing number of roles; Heather Verkade for her competent management of the Society's finances and business issues; and Alpha Yap for his prompt and insightful feedback on every issue. Thanks also to State Reps for their local efforts, Newsletter contributors, and to those who take on roles on behalf of the society, particularly in the organization of the various meetings.

Graham J. Lieschke

President

Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology

September 23rd, 2005.