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**President's Report**  
**to the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the ANZSCDBI (ComBio01)**  
**Canberra, September 30<sup>th</sup>-October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001.**



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The Society has continued to grow over the past few years thanks to the hard work of past executives but particularly our immediate past-President Brian Key and his team. We, as the new executive, have set goals to further enhance the Society's national profile through higher membership targets, continued support of local workshops and meetings, encouragement of greater student participation in Society activities, and a stronger voice on the political stage through both FASTS and ASMR.

The membership of the Society at the time of changeover of the executive was very healthy - at 180 financial members. Even after the usual reminders about the deadline for membership renewals in March the number fell to 153 at the end of the financial year (115 full members and 38 students members), in what appears to be a disturbing downward trend for the majority of national societies (FASTS, 2001). Nevertheless, the executive has persisted with both general email reminders and individually directed communication through July, August and September, and introduced additional benefits of holding Society membership. Most notable amongst these benefits are the significant discounts on subscriptions to prominent cell and developmental biology journals including *Development*, *Journal of Cell Science*, *Developmental Biology*, as well as a number of journals from the Nature Publishing Group, including the Nature Reviews series and *Nature Cell Biology*. Time will tell as to whether these initiatives will have any positive impact on new memberships or at least membership retention rates. We are, nevertheless, pleased to report that as of the time of this annual meeting, the Society can boast a record membership of 205 financial members, despite significant decreases in memberships in two States (Queensland and Victoria) with traditional strengths in cell and developmental biology. The executive plans to look into this issue over the coming months and will work closely with the respective State Representatives to address the situation. Against this increasing academic membership of the Society is the backward slide of corporate membership numbers. This is likely to have been heavily influenced by the continued joint society meeting (ComBio) format, an issue noted and tackled by the past executive. That the problem has reappeared and worsened is of great concern given the valuable financial contribution to the Society by these members. Discussions amongst the executive will hopefully result in acceptance of a proposal to begin to rectify this matter.

The Society's newsletter continues to be an effective means of disseminating news of member activities and other items that might be of interest to members, including upcoming meetings, Society-sponsored workshops, and updates on the political activities of both ASMR and FASTS. The executive would like to pass on their thanks to the secretariat for their continued efforts with assembling the newsletter and for working through a new printing firm in order to save the Society around \$1500 per year in printing costs. The executive is also greatly appreciative of the effort of the State Representatives in preparing articles on State activities for the newsletters, and to Peter French for his hard work as the biological sciences representative on the FASTS board.

The changeover of the executive at the beginning of this year was followed soon after with a changeover in the management of the Society's web pages due to the resignation of the previous webmaster, Dominic Ng. This changeover necessitated a relocation of the Society's web site to Adelaide where it can now be accessed at two new addresses ([www.anzscdbi.adelaide.edu.au](http://www.anzscdbi.adelaide.edu.au) and [www.celldev.adelaide.edu.au](http://www.celldev.adelaide.edu.au)). The relatively frequent requests to post new job advertisements on

the site suggests that it is beginning to be recognised by the cell and developmental biology community as a useful resource. However, the maintenance of the web site has posed a particular burden to the current executive and so it is with pleasure that I can announce that Duane Rivett (Department of Molecular Biosciences, Adelaide University) has offered his services to assist with maintenance of the website as of October.

The ComBio meeting format encompassing the ANZSCDBI, ASBMB and ASPP, and variously other national and international societies continues to be a winner for all societies involved. Special thanks must be extended to Eldon Ball, Chris Parish as well as the conference coordinator, Sally Jay, and other members of the organising committee who have done a splendid job in shaping the scientific program for this year's meeting in Canberra despite battling many last minute program changes as a result of the US tragedy and the Ansett Airlines collapse. The meeting also marks a new commitment by the Society in the form of travel awards for students wishing to present their work at the national meeting. This year, eight pro-rata awards were granted as a result of applications from Perth (3), Townsville (2), Brisbane (1) and Adelaide (2). With the overwhelming corporate backing of ComBio01, together with the Society's smooth hosting of the International Congress on Differentiation and Cell Biology last year, we are poised to further consolidate the Society's financial position.

The Society's profile has also been significantly aided by the Current Topics program that was instigated by the previous executive and enthusiastically embraced by our members. In providing financial assistance to four member-run national specialist cell and / or developmental biology symposia per year, this program is clearly achieving its original aim - to foster greater communication and collaboration between national researchers with shared interests. Given the move towards program-based funding by both the NHMRC and ARC this executive will remain committed to ensuring the success of this program.

The Society's Student Exchange Scheme, in stark contrast to the Current Topics program, continues to receive little interest. This scheme was established with the goal of assisting four student members per year (to the tune of \$500 each) to travel to a distant lab to learn a new technique or undertake collaborative work that is essential for their studies. The value of the scheme as an ongoing commitment, I feel, must now be reviewed.

In other areas of activity, the Society was represented by two of its Queensland members, Melissa Little and Fiona Wylie, at this years Science Meets Parliament Day. This day, organized by FASTS, sees scientists and federal politicians meeting face-to-face in the largest one-day lobbying event by a single profession ever staged in Parliament House. The day has a lasting impact on the politicians and scientists involved and can, in part, be credited for the increases in funding seen in the last budget as well as that in the pre-election promises. The Society must continue to support the efforts of our lobbying groups such FASTS, ASMR and NARF (the National Association of Research Fellows), as there are still many issues of major concern to the Australian research community.

Finally, I am particularly excited about the future for the Society and for the profile of cell and developmental biology in both Australia and New Zealand. This executive is looking forward to the year ahead and to instigating new initiatives to benefit our members.

Timothy Cox  
President

Australia & New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology Inc.

September, 2001