

## ESTABLISHMENT OF FASTS

The 1984 Federal Budget made substantial cuts to funding for science, slashing CSIRO and ARGS (now the ARC). This drew attention to the relatively unpredictable and generally unsatisfactory level of Federal Government support for scientific research. Minister for Science Barry Jones infamously accused the science and technology community of being 'wimpish' in its lobbying and not providing him with sufficient muscle in his cabinet dealings. Bruce Stone and other members sprang to action and were involved with negotiations with the other major Australian scientific societies and the AAS. Thus, in late 1985, FASTS (Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies) was formed, with the ABS as a foundation member. Today, FASTS acts as a representative roof body for 65,000 scientists in Australia from 66 member organisations, working to influence the formulation of science and technology policy for economic, environmental and social benefit. A key initiative of FASTS since 1999 has been the annual 'Science meets Parliament' Day, whereby scientists (including ASBMB members) have face-to-face meetings with members of Parliament and their advisors.

## FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETIES



**Above: Science Breakfast – an opportunity for early career scientists to meet young parliamentarians.**



**Above: ASBMB's SmP 2005 representatives at the Science-Industry Dinner in Parliament House (left to right) Jacqui Matthews, Ylva Strandberg, Rohan Baker, Terry Walsh and Phillip Nagley.**



## THE MOVE TO CONVENTION CENTRES

The 1988 meeting held at the Adelaide Convention Centre signified a major change – it was the first time the Society utilised a meeting site other than a university. John de Jersey recalls, "I remember leaving the constraints of the university venue. It was so different from what we'd had to put up with in the past, so flexible we could have a modern exhibition, we could have facilities that were as good as the standard in professional life." Bruce Stone adds, "The decision to hold annual meetings outside universities was a big step. The problems that we had in the run-up to that, in getting appropriate accommodation for our speakers and delegates, were getting too much. And then the universities were going to start charging us." The venue was more expensive, but it derived a big increase in exhibitor revenue. Indeed, it was the first self-sufficient conference that the Society did not need to underwrite. It also required serious future planning – conference centres need to be booked sometimes 10 years in advance. But not all members were comfortable with the move: Gerhard Schreiber tells, "I wasn't so happy about the change to running the ABS meetings in commercial convention facilities. Before that, the ABS meetings were held in universities; that meant more work for the biochemists but the great advantage was that you met your colleagues in their natural environment. You could actually see what the other departments and universities were like. It was also better for the students and young scientists who used college accommodation. Also the retrieval of quick information was possible because people had access to their labs or to a lab of a colleague." In 1990, one last conference was held at a university site due to the high costs of commercial centres, but after problems of insufficient space, it was generally understood that a permanent move to convention centres was necessary. Thus, since 1991, all Society scientific conferences have been held in convention centres, a move which on the whole has pleased organising committees, delegates and Sustaining Members alike.



**Above: ComBio2001 at the National Convention Centre, Canberra.**



**Above: Interested participants at ComBio2003, Melbourne Convention Centre.**



**Left: Computers in use at ComBio2002, Darling Harbour Convention Centre, Sydney.**

## 1989 MEETING AGAINST THE ODDS

The ABS meeting of late September 1989 was foreshadowed by the bitter airline pilots' strike that began one month prior. Four to five hundred delegates were expected, and there was the real risk that hundreds of interstate delegates would be unable to attend. Against the odds, 390 participants arrived, and the conference was a success. Phillip Nagley recalls, "the 1989 meeting at the Gold Coast was a spectacular meeting, particularly in view of the adversity that many people had overcome in order to get there. It made one feel like quite an intrepid traveller, having to venture by bus, train or aeroplanes from specially commissioned overseas airlines operating temporarily in Australia. It was quite an exciting meeting once everyone got there, there was a sense of 'we're here to do our science no matter what adversity, we're going to have a great time'." Bruce Stone reminisces, "I remember conducting the Annual General Meeting with a deadline because Bill Sawyer had actually hired a plane to circumvent the pilots' strike – we flew up from Melbourne to Coolangatta, and we had to get back to the airport in time. We had a number of issues to debate and be voted on and the number of delegates was dwindling as they went home. We almost had to get some of the waiters to stand in as members to get some matters through! [laughter]." John de Jersey was Head of the 1989 Organising Committee and regards this meeting as significant because, "it was held in the Conrad International Hotel and Convention Centre, so you could have people living in and enjoying a good conference centre as well. The other thing about that meeting was that it was the first time it was held in September, which was a good step. Before that we had it in May, and September is a far better time, weather-wise and availability-wise." Bruce Stone recalls the novelty of having a Society meeting at a casino, "I remember suggesting that people could buy lottery tickets between sessions, but that didn't happen [laughter]."



## SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Bill Sawyer relates that during his Presidency in the early 1990s, "The issue which really was of concern to me was the establishment of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) because we were starting to see the phenomenon of biochemistry splitting into sub-disciplines. I remember before one Council meeting, actually writing the guidelines for SIGs overnight to make sure they'd be ready for the next day. It was a very important concept, a way of supporting the sub-discipline areas whilst trying to keep them within the umbrella of the Society." Edith Lees continues, "There was quite a lot of enthusiasm for this. The West Australian Representative, Norman Palmer, felt that SIGs were necessary to allow the various diverse groups of scientific interest to have more autonomy, organise small meetings themselves, and to have an input into the programs for the annual Society meetings. In terms of the Society's resources, funding allocations were made on the basis of numbers of people interested". Bruce Stone notes "SIGs have been a good thing, they have captured some of the possibilities. I remember setting up SIGs because we lost the Free Radical Group – they got free! [laughter]." Thus, the Biochemical Education Group was the first SIG, formed in 1989, and a Biochemical Education workshop, convened by Graham Parslow, was held in 1992 at the Melbourne Zoo in the marmoset enclosure. There were 45 participants, "led by international veterans of Biochemical Education: Frank Vella (Canada), Alan Mehler (USA) and Ed Wood (UK)." Today there are nine ASBMB SIGs: Biochemical Education; Queensland Protein; Sydney Protein; Metabolism and Molecular Medicine; Plant Biochemistry and Molecular Biology; Bioinformatics; Transcription; Glycoscience; and Australian Yeast Groups.

**Below: SIG / Executive Breakfast held at the 1994 ASBMB meeting (left to right) Les Copeland, Tony Dawson, Terry Walsh, Liz Dennis, Alan Jones, Philip Kuchel, Pat Gibbs, Adrian Gibbs, Michael Thomas, Eric Colquhoun and Edith Lees.**



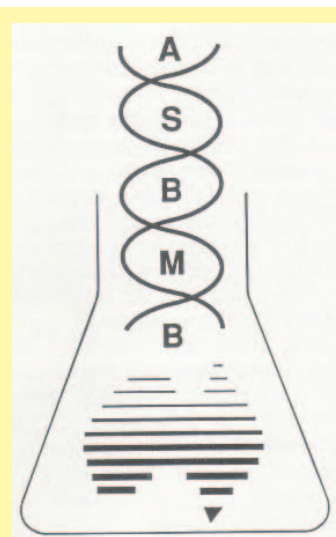
**Above: 1992 ABS Biochemical Education Group workshop at the Melbourne Zoo.**



# 1986-1995

## ASBMB - INCORPORATION OF MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

In 1990, the Society underwent a name change to incorporate the burgeoning field of molecular biology into its title. Bill Sawyer credits Bruce Stone with this, "He had many innovative ideas. In fact, ASBMB was almost first off the rank, beating IUBMB and FAOBMB." Nick Hoogenraad recalls, "that was an angst-filled period, with the traditionalists wanting to hold onto ABS, and the young Turks wanting to reclaim the title of Molecular Biology." John de Jersey describes the debate further, "Some people thought there's no difference, biochemistry and molecular biology mean the same thing, so why change it? But it was a very good move and preceded many departments around the country changing their names. It was important because it said, 'This is the society for molecular biology.'" Tony Linnane rues, "If I'd had my life to live over, it might have been the Australian Society for Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology."



New logo for new name of Society, designed by PhD student Lindsay Collinson.

## NEW LOOK NEWSLETTER

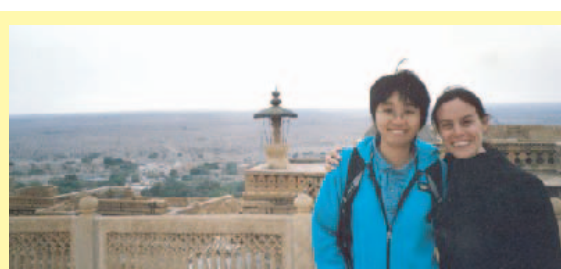
Under the editorship of Ted McMurchie, the ABS Newsletter was enhanced. It moved from a four-sided listing of notices and announcements to a ten-sided publication that contained more articles and a new Forthcoming Meetings section in 1989, and then in 1990, a stapled publication of 24 sides which continued to grow in content and size exponentially. Ted McMurchie wrote in the February 1990 Newsletter, "The establishment of a strong communication network through the enlarged Newsletter is the first step in raising the awareness of members of ongoing biochemical activities and developments both in Australia and abroad, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Now it is time for the second step – to a superior quality Newsletter, which we hope will enhance the image of the Society, not only in the eyes of its members, but also in the eyes of those working in biochemistry and related fields and in industry." The publication cost of the newsletter has logically increased over time, but it is seen as a crucial publicity tool. Its distribution was broadened to include not only members, but also head offices of other societies, committee members of FAOBMB, Sustaining Members and the Conference Registration issue to institutions that employ biochemists and molecular biologists to improve recruitment and communication with other organisations. In 1993, Graham Parslow became Editor of the ABS Newsletter.



February 1990 issue of the Society's newsletter.

## ASBMB RESEARCH FUND AND FELLOWSHIPS

At the 1991 AGM, the ASBMB Research Fund for tax-free donations was established. Edith Lees lauds Treasurer Bob Blakeley, "He did all the paperwork in establishing the Research Fund which would allow us to receive bequests." The first project supported by this fund was the ASBMB Fellowships in 1992. Numerous ASBMB Fellowships are awarded annually to deserving researchers early in their career, allowing them to attend overseas conferences or visit specialised laboratories. John Wallace comments, "I like to think of the Fellowships as investments because we're not just spending the money, we're investing it. I'm sure we're investing it in the young people because you can just see it; look at the quality of the reports we get in the *Australian Biochemist*, they are excellent, they make me very happy to see how well those people have used them." (see ASBMB Fellowships Profiles in this issue).



ASBMB Fellowship awardee Ann Kwan (left) and fellow PhD student Fionna Loughlin, who travelled to a conference in India. They are pictured touring the Golden Fort in Jaisalmer.



# 1986-1995

## PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE COORDINATION AND NATIONAL OFFICE

The concept of professional support for the Society's activities began to be explored in the late 1980s. The 1987 Perth meeting made use of the Conference and Development Office of the University of Western Australia. At the 1988 Adelaide meeting, ABS engaged the services of Jenny Blanchard, a professional conference organiser. John Wallace welcomed this development, stating, "the introduction of the professional conference organisers was of huge benefit, I can say that with some feeling because at the 1974 meeting in Adelaide, I was one of the people doing the leg work and I can assure you I got very little out of that meeting scientifically, I was too busy running around." In 1990, Treasurer Bob Blakeley noted the need for a National Office to oversee the annual conferences, "The rotation of this major conference among capital cities is one of the strengths of the Society. This rotation involves 'starting from scratch' each year and that necessarily requires an enormous effort on the part of the local committee."

Moreover, it was noted that administrative assistance was needed for the overburdened office bearers. Thus, in 1991, the National Office was set up under Sally Tyson, now Jay. Since then, Sally and her team (Jenny Blanchard, and since 2001, Chris Jay) have organised nine Society conferences (1993, 1996, 1998, ComBio99, ComBio2001-2005). Phillip Nagley notes, "The National Office grew from the need to have a continuous geographically stable and active resource for the Society in terms of organising its national activities, as well as the interface between the Society and its Sustaining Members. Sally herself must be mentioned as an individual who has been an extremely loyal worker and supporter of the Society." John de Jersey concurs, "Sally has been fantastic, taking over the administrative part of the running of conferences and running the Society generally speaking; it's been very professional, economical and efficient. She has freed up the local committees to do what is important which is run the program and invite and look after the speakers, and not have to worry so much about taking in the money or arranging for the exhibition. She's also been great at fostering links with trade and that's terrific."



Chris and Sally Jay at ComBio2004.

Sally Jay recalls her first ASBMB conference, 1993 in Adelaide, "I remember rolling up to the Convention Centre in the wee hours on the Monday morning to get prepared for registration to find a fire truck parked between the Convention Centre and the Hyatt. Unfortunately there was a fire in our exhibition hall which had burnt down one of the booths and the water from the sprays had seriously damaged equipment on two other booths. Not a good way to start your first major conference! I also clearly remember the conference dinner at Hardy's Winery. Waiting for the buses – it was the worst winter's day you could imagine, the wind was so bad that the trees on North Terrace were nearly horizontal with the road. The buses arrived and off we set for Reynella. Our bus got lost so we arrived 30 minutes late! Anyway, it did not detract from an absolutely fantastic night and everyone had a ball."





## 1995 FAOBMB CONGRESS

In 1995, the 7th FAOBMB Congress of Biochemistry was held under the auspices of ASBMB and NZSBMB in Darling Harbour, Sydney. Gerry Wake recounts, "I was the Chair of the Scientific Program Committee and I certainly enjoyed it. We had a tremendous program committee, with broad representation from Society members, from Special Interest Groups, and people from a large number of universities and research institutes: they all worked very hard. Justice Michael Kirby gave a wonderful contribution on the legal and ethical aspects of the human genome project. That was one of the first meetings where we involved people outside the scientific community, and I think it was very successful." Philip Kuchel, Chair of the Organising Committee, continues, "We had over 1000 delegates which at the time was a quantum leap, and there

were delegates from all of the member countries of FAOBMB. It was a really heady meeting – it was opened by Thomas Cech, Nobel Prize winner, and there was terrific science presented by people really on the rise, such as Paul Nurse, Iain Campbell and Suzanne Cory. The dinner was held in the overseas liner terminal at Circular Quay overlooking the Opera House, and international visitors thought it was fantastic." Gerry Wake remembers two funny interactions, "We wrote a letter to Iain Campbell, Oxford NMR researcher, and he replied and said, 'Yes, I'll be keen to come to Australia, if I'm still alive at that time.' He was, thank goodness [laughter]. The other unusual thing is, we started to plan extremely early, two years before the meeting, and we sent out invitations early. We invited a chap from Japan who told me his story: 'We were ready to come and the day before we were going to get on the plane to come out to Australia, I looked more closely at the letter you'd sent me and I realised that we were coming out a year in advance!'" Philip Kuchel evokes other anecdotes, "We had a reception on Saturday night for the FAOBMB chief honchos in Darling Harbour. It turned out really well because for some reason unconnected with our meeting they had a fireworks display. So all the delegates thought we were putting it on for them [laughter]. I also have a really nice memory of Kunio Yagi, then IUBMB President, a very famous Japanese biochemist from a famous family of samurai. He held a reception on the last night, a lavish dinner for about 30 guests. On three occasions Yagi got up and sang a folk song and thanked people, and there was much nodding and bowing [laughter]. So that was very interesting – the different cultures came together: it truly was an international meeting."

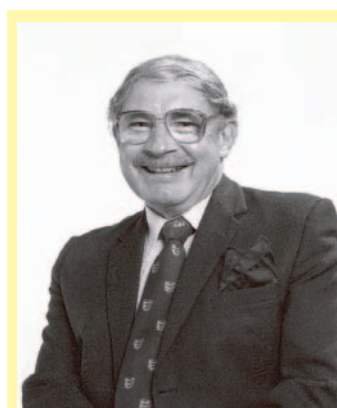
## KEY PLAYERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Under John Williams many innovative ideas were brought forward, including: punctual and new newsletter format; moving conferences from May to September; advanced publication of symposium titles; Australia to host an FAOB conference in the 1990s; and supporting high school science competitions. John was aware of stagnating membership numbers and was focussed on making improvements in order to strengthen the Society's standing.

John also set up a committee to consider professional accreditation due to both potential membership benefits and pressure from the Federal Government. Bruce Stone remarks, "ASBMB is a democratic, scientific society, and not a professional institute. A hierarchical structure didn't seem appropriate and I think we are better off without it. The Society has never been like an institute because our members are from diverse institutions and employment, and so it didn't seem to be appropriate." John describes the outcome, "the Society didn't want to go at that time, by its vote, in a professional direction. And as it turns out, it was probably the right decision to make. I think that ComBio meetings seem to be the answer to the professional point that we ought to have reached."

Bruce Stone was also seen as a highly active President. During his presidency, he also served as Secretary of FASTS and Society Representative at FAOB. Phillip Nagley comments, "Bruce was a hands-on President, he organised an active Executive, he encouraged the Editor to upgrade the Newsletter, and he used to involve the Executive plus local ABS members in dealing with the internal and external issues." Many important developments took place during Bruce Stone's term of office.

In the early 1990s, Liz Dennis became the first (and thus far only) female President of the Society. Her background in plant biology increased interactions with the plant field, "I was keen to try to integrate the plant people, and that's worked quite well. There's a theme running through the whole of biology and you can learn from it – it's important people talk to each other. Gene regulation, structural biology, metabolism – important topics like these are common." Liz was also keenly aware of the need for balance between generalist and specialist material at ASBMB meetings, noting the dual purposes of the Society, "It must provide the general intellectual environment for people to keep abreast of the major advances in biochemistry in the broad sense and offer enough depth in specialist areas that scientists feel that it is worthwhile coming to our Annual meeting because there is enough attention to their own discipline."



John Williams in 1988.



# 1994 ASBMB CONFERENCE, 26-29 SEPTEMBER, CONRAD JUPITERS, GOLD COAST



Bruce Stone (left) catching up with Bill Elliott.



David Hume.



Bob Blakeley.



Left and right:  
Sustaining  
Members  
Trade Display  
booths.



Fun times at the conference  
dinner, held at Sea World.

