Australian National University

Research School of Biology Newsletter

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News from the Director

In place of my irregular updates by email on matters of interest to the School, I have decided to add a short piece in the monthly newsletter. This should be more regular and save everyone deleting the email I would usually send. In response to a request for more information, I will post highlights of decisions made by your RSB Executive on the RSB intranet.

Since my last email (February 10th) we have immersed ourselves in delivery of 1st semester courses, which appear to be proceeding quite smoothly. Repairs to the roof of both RSB buildings and the Science Teaching labs are progressing, with a remarkable amount of scaffolding going up and down.

I am pleased to announce that the winner of the 2023 Slatyer Medal is Professor Jennifer Martin, a highly accomplished structural biologist and a strong advocate for women in STEM. The event to celebrate her achievements is set for May 9th and I hope to see many of you there.

As I'm now two years along as Director of RSB, it was time to ask whether the changes I made to how we govern ourselves are effective and meeting expectations. An internal review, led by Ben Corry, John Rathjen and Ana Sequiera, and considering the Professional Ethical Framework for academics developed by AAUP (see here), made several very useful recommendations . After further discussion with Faculty it has been decided to disband the RSB Strategy Group and have all Committees report at quarterly meetings of RSB Faculty. I will continue to meet with all Professional Staff each quarter and with Committee Chairs (especially EMCR, HDR and IDEA) that often at the least. I hope that these changes will maintain broad engagement around the issues that matter to you all. Our collegial and inclusive work environment depends on this. On the topic of engagement, I remind Group Leaders that we have calls out for EoIs for the roles of Head of Ecology and Evolution and for Associate Director HDR, closing on April 16.

I had a good meeting this month with Professional Staff where each Team outlined areas in which they would benefit from further training. Updating and expanding skills across our excellent staff is vital as we adapt to changes in teaching, research and the infrastructure that supports all this. Where there is broad interest in a specific set of skills, we can always bring a trainer into RSB – such may be the case for project management, as discussed at our meeting. In response to discussion of the RSB Infrastructure Review Panel, we have recruited an experienced member of professional staff, Stephanie McCaffery, on to the RSB Infrastructure Review Panel which continues its work.

Another recommendation from the governance review was that there should be more communication about outcomes from the RSB Executive, the main decision-making body of the School. The new RSB structure can be found here. Previously I included a quarterly summary of outcomes in the reports to the RSB Strategy Group – but now will include a short account of recent (Feb, March) outcomes in this newsletter. Recent decisions relate to support of field-based research and teaching, the Shandong program, a new policy on strategic recruitments, progress on administration efficiency and on the Infrastructure Plan, supporting nominees for research awards, and the 2023 budget.

Congratulations

Three 2023 MEC applications from RSB have been successful, with a total of three applications submitted, that makes it a 100% success rate. Congratulations:

- **Christina Spry** (BSB) *MicroCal PEAQ-ITC for direct and label-free measurement of biomolecule interactions* $138,230k.
- **Danielle Way** (PS) *Full range field spectrometer for high throughout analysis of vegetation and soil* $74,168k.
- **Neelam Gogoi** (FCTC, PS) *Enabling Nanotechnology for Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation* $56,788k. A total of 22 contributions were received from across five Schools, two Centres and three Colleges including from ten EMCRs. The award will actively drive nanotechnology research across multidisciplinary and diverse teams at ANU. It will be the first and only Malvern Zetasizer Ultra RED equipment on campus.

Congratulations to **Salome Wilson** and **Ashley Jones** (both Schwessinger Group, PS) who were awarded Science and Innovation Awards from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Murray Watt. Ashley for his work on *Identifying the dynamic plant RNA modifications needed to combat myrtle rust* presented by Forest and Wood Products Australia, and Salome for her work on *Rapid validation of novel genes involved in plant disease* presented by Grains Research and Development Corporation. More information can be found here.

Salome's award are featured in Timber & Forestry enews issue 746

From L to R - Senator Murray Watts, Salome Wilson, Nigel Hart (Managing Director GRDC).

From L to R Senator Murray Watts, Ashley Jones, Kevin Peachey (Statistics and Economics Manager Forest and Wood Products Australia)

A Westpac Research Fellowship has been awarded to **Kai Chan** (PS) who is undertaking research to solve how plants sense and respond to challenging environments to improve crop yields in the face of climate change. Congratulations Kai.

Call out for PhD students

Watch this.... RSB PhD students and professional staff have put together a great video to promote doing your PhD at RSB.

PhDs commenced

Ethan Beaver (Keogh Group, E&E)
Lisa Fontana (Aplin Group, E&E)
Nils Kreuter (Sequeira Group, E&E)
Naomi Laven (Noble Group, E&E)

Welcome

Alex Skeels (Cardillo Group, E&E) has come from ETH Zurich to join the Macroevolution & Macroecology Group as a Postdoc. He'll be working on phylogenetics, evolution and conservation of Proteaceae.

Welcome to **Julie Leroux** (FCTC, PS) who has recently joined the ARC Training Centre for Future Crops as a Project Officer. Julie has recently finished writing up her PhD (Pogson Group). Julie's experience prior to this in Western Australia, across both lab establishment and management, and her role as a member of a Centre of Excellence are very valuable to the Training Centre. Julie's role will include Training Centre lab activities, operations and communications and outreach. Derek Collinge is also working with the Training Centre and Alisha Duncan has moved to a new role with Cooperative Research Australia.

Welcome to **Julian Greenwood** (FCTC, PS) who has recently joined the ARC Training Centre for Future Crops as an Innovation Fellow, following a role with the Jones Group (PS) at RSB. Julian will be focussing on optimising plant transformation, particular in chickpea, by employing developmental regulators. Julian will also be working with Training Centre students, EMCRs and industry partners as part of the initiative.

Equity and Inclusiveness

The new IDEA section of the CoS website is now live. The recent progress towards gender equality and diversity section under the Community tab sets out recent progress in each of the College of Science Schools in addressing equity and diversity issues. The website includes links to various resources, including the Diverse and Equitable Workforce development action plans for each School, and the Community events calendar. The blog will be used to advertise upcoming events.

News

The Centre of Excellence for Translational Photosynthesis (CoETP) research makes the news in the USA on SorghuamBase. Read here.

Jennie Mallela joined the creator and children's author Antoine JaJa for the launch of the Jack the Super Prawn ocean hero books. Jack rescues sea creatures from marine plastic pollution and through his books and games teaches children to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. The ocean hero was introduced to >700 school children and teachers in New South Wales. Books, games and citizen science activities were introduced with talks and entertainment provided by Antoine JaJa (Creator), Anthony Matthews (Assistant Principal, St John XXIII Catholic College), Ken Davis (Environmental Composer), Alex Wymarra (Chairman of the Treaty Council Worldwide), Jennie Mallela (ANU Scientific Advisor) and Tom Cresswell (ANSTO). The event was a huge success.

The ANU Kioloa Coastal Campus is now fully operational and there is increasing use from Groups across the College of Science (and elsewhere). Please do keep it in mind as a venue for any sort of group event (e.g. group retreats, writing workshops etc.). The campus is booked via this webpage. For a short (49-second) video highlighting some of what the Kioloa campus has to offer see here – highlights of a recent visit by students from the Shandong University - ANU Joint Science College.

Papers

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