



# AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR BIOPHYSICS

## **The Australian Society for Biophysics: A Brief History**

(First published in the journal of the Biophysical Society of Japan, 2007)

The Australian Society for Biophysics (ASB) is a very active society, albeit a small one, with about 150 members. It organizes an annual scientific conference, which is attended by around 100 participants and which highlights the diverse range of interests of our membership. The most recent Annual Conference (our 30<sup>th</sup>) was held in Sydney last December and, as an example of the research areas of interest to Australian biophysicists, featured sessions on Protein Structure and Dynamics (headed by our keynote speaker Art Palmer), Biomimetic Materials, Biophysics of Ion Channels, Membrane Structure and Function and Biophysics of Cellular and Biochemical Processes, in addition to other topics and a poster session.

The ASB was formed following an inaugural meeting held at La Trobe University in Melbourne on 13 May, 1975. Alex Hope (Flinders University) opened the meeting and Hans Coster outlined the necessity of forming a new society, separate from the Biophysics Group of the Australian Institute of Physics. Although the Australian Academy of Science had a National Committee on Biophysics, which was the adhering body to IUPAB, there was no formal Society to represent Biophysics in Australia. An interim committee was set up with Alan Walker (Sydney University) as president and Hans Coster (University of New South Wales, UNSW) as secretary/treasurer. Representatives were nominated from each state and David Parry, a future IUPAB president, was the regional New Zealand representative. The constitution of the Society was passed at the first annual general meeting (AGM) held in May 1976 at the University of New England, Armidale. Peter Mason (Macquarie University) was elected president, Hans Coster secretary and Peter Barry (UNSW) treasurer.

The first Annual Conference and second AGM were held in August 1977 at the University of New South Wales, and the proceedings were published with John Smith (UNSW) as editor. The third AGM was held in conjunction with the national conference at Flinders University and Alex Hope (Flinders) was elected president. Other presidents over the three decades of ASB's existence have been Bruce Scott (University Tasmania, 1980-1981), Hans Coster (1982-1983), Jan Anderson (CSIRO, 1984-1985), Bill Sawyer (University of Melbourne, 1986-1988), Philip Kuchel (University of Sydney, 1988-1989), Bruce Cornell (CSIRO, 1990-1991), Jim Pope (UNSW, 1992-1993), Christa Critchley (University of Queensland, 1994-1995), Cris dos Remedios (University of Sydney, 1995-1996), Glenn King (University of Sydney, 1997-1998), Frances Separovic (University of Melbourne, 1998-1999), Ray Norton (BRI/WEHI, 2000-2002), Peter Barry (UNSW, 2002-2004) and Boris Martinac (University of WA/ University of Queensland, 2004-2006). Our current president is Brett Hambly (University of Sydney).

The Society was incorporated on 28 July 1998, thanks to the efforts of Cyril Curtain prior to the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting in Canberra. A few years ago the Academy Sub-committee for Biophysics became part of the National Committee for Biomedical Sciences, chaired by Philip Kuchel, a past president of ASB.

From time to time ASB organises its annual conference in conjunction with, or partially overlapping, conferences of kindred societies. The 12<sup>th</sup> annual meeting was held at UNSW, Sydney, in conjunction with the Congress of Physics, to coincide with the Australian bicentenary of European settlement in January 1988. Several conferences (for example in 1999 and 2004) have been held adjacent to the large ComBio conference, which is an annual meeting encompassing a range of biological societies, including the Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. A joint session at ISMAR 95 on Macromolecular Structure and Function was held with the British Biophysical Society. Another joint meeting with the British Biophysical Society on Biomembrane Structure and Function was held at Oxford, UK, as a satellite meeting to IUPAB 1996 in Amsterdam. In 1997, a joint meeting with the Japanese and US Biophysical Societies on muscle proteins was held in Maui with over 80 participants. The ASB organized a workshop on Membrane Protein Structure Determination as a satellite to the Lorne Conference on Protein Structure and Function in February 2004, and, with IUPAB support, also organized a Fluorescence Workshop in Coffs Harbour, NSW, which was followed by ASB 2004 in Perth, WA. In 2005, Cris dos Remedios, Boris Martinac and Ray Norton represented ASB in a joint ASB-JSB session at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Biophysical Society of Japan on the beautiful island of Hokkaido. The 29<sup>th</sup> ASB conference was held in Canberra in 2005 in conjunction with the Australian Physiological Society (APS), and our next conference, the 31<sup>st</sup>, will also be a joint meeting with APS in December 2007 in Newcastle, NSW. The highly interdisciplinary nature of biophysics in Australia is well highlighted by these different joint meetings, but the field, and indeed the Society, retain their unique characteristics. Our annual conferences can be relied upon to provide thought-provoking talks on topics as diverse as the biophysics of music and the remediation of contaminated soils using ultrasonics!

The Society makes two major awards annually. To recognise outstanding contributions to the field of biophysics in Australia and New Zealand and to commemorate the contributions to the Society and to Australian science in general of Sir Rutherford (Bob) Robertson, we inaugurated The Bob Robertson Award of the Australian Society for Biophysics in 2002. The Award is open to all financial members of the Society; while research contributions are of primary importance, other contributions, including to biophysics teaching or service to the discipline, are also considered. Awardees are presented with a medal and a cheque, and deliver a lecture at the Annual Conference. The awardees (2003-2006) are Hans Coster, Alex Hope, Peter Gage, Philip Kuchel and Peter Barry (see photos below, which are in chronological order from top left). In 1995, the Society instituted an award for young investigators, the Young Biophysicist Award (YBA). Its purpose is to encourage members of the Society who are about to or have recently embarked on a career in biophysics. The award is made to the eligible candidate who makes the best presentation (oral or poster) at the Annual Conference and carries a cash prize.



Robertson Award presentations, 2002-2006

Several members of our Society have made significant contributions to biophysics organisations beyond our shores. David Parry was president of IUPAB from 1997 to 2000, Frances Separovic was a member of IUPAB Council 2003-2005 and Cris dos Remedios was Vice-President 2005-2007. Frances is currently a member of Council of the Biophysical Society (USA), 2007-2009.

Further information about ASB, along with contact details, are available at our website: <http://www.biophysics.org.au/>.

In closing, may we say on behalf of ASB that we are excited by the prospect of closer links with our fellow biophysicists throughout the world, and look forward with enthusiasm to successfully bidding for the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics Congress in 2014.

**Ray Norton, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, Australia**  
**Frances Separovic, University of Melbourne, Australia**

August 2007.