

Citation for Emeritus Professor: Robert Banks

Professor Robert Banks served as the Director of the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU) at UNE, from 2013 to 2021. Established in 1976 and based in Armidale, AGBU is a joint venture between the University of New England and the NSW Department of Primary Industries. With a large team of research scientists working across a range of livestock industries, AGBU is a world leader in R&D for genetic evaluation and improvement systems, including BREEDPLAN, LAMBPLAN, PIGBLUP and TREEPLAN. Dr Banks has overseen the AGBU team as it worked to develop and implement significant developments in these systems, and over that time has expanded AGBU's capacity and capabilities to service the livestock industries and more recently growing AGBU into new frontiers including plants, seafood and bees.

Prior to taking up the role of Director, AGBU, he worked for Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) for nearly 25 years, initially in the role of establishing the genetic evaluation system for the Australian lamb industry, LAMBPLAN. Dr Banks then led the process of extending LAMBPLAN to provide genetic evaluation for the Merino industry. Subsequently, and in response to rapid advances in genomic technologies, he led the development of Australian Information Nucleus flocks and herds. Intensive recording of performance in these populations aims to maximise the returns from investing in genomic testing in the Australian red meat industries. His role in Meat and Livestock Australia extended to include management of R&D investments across the full spectrum of pasture improvement, grazing systems, climate change adaptation and genetic improvement.

Professor Banks is an outstanding industry thought leader, scholar and researcher who has made impressive contributions both to the University and the Australian livestock industry. His industry leadership and reputation has been further evidenced by several prestigious appointments and awards spanning his career. From 2014 to present, he was appointed to Board membership of Tree Breeding Australia, and from 2017 to present, to Board membership of Australian Seafood Industries. In 2005, Dr Banks' contribution to Animal Genetic Analysis was recognised by the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (ATSE) with the prestigious Clunies Ross Award. In 2007, the Association for the Advancement of Animal Breeding and Genetics appointed him to the status of Fellow of AAABG. In 2011 he was the recipient of the Helen Newton Turner Medal, awarded to persons who have made an outstanding contribution to genetic improvement of Australian livestock.

Throughout his career, Professor Banks communicated directly with breeders and producers across a range of species, helping to make powerful technologies accessible. And alongside the communication, he mentored many young scientists and breeders with encouragement and wisdom freely shared.