

# The Royal Society of Queensland Annual Report 2021–2022

## Overview

This report covers the period from 1 November 2021 to 31 October 2022.

The work program has been less intensive than in the previous year. Uncertain, changing restrictions on personnel movements on account of COVID-19 have discouraged the Society from attempting to convene face-to-face meetings, and a significant proposed event was cancelled for want of registrations.

Just as Council reported last year, the Society remains in precarious financial health. The plainest evidence is that it has not been able to meet the cost of typesetting or printing the 2022 *Proceedings* without substantial anonymous donations.

## Corporate Affairs

### The Royal Society of Queensland Council

The Council elected at the Annual General Meeting on 9 December 2021 comprised **Dr Ross Hynes** as President, **Dr Peter Dart**, **Dr Heather Douglas**, **Dr Geoff Edwards** as Vice-President, Policy, **Andy Grodecki**, **James Hansen** as Secretary, **Ben Lodge** (until 30 September), **Col Lynam**, and **Dr Joseph McDowall** as Treasurer.

Honorary Editor 2021, **Assoc. Prof. Julien Louys** of Griffith University, moved to Associate Editor role for 2022, and **Trevor Love** did not nominate for re-election.

**Dr Justyna Miskiewicz** of University of Queensland took on the position of Honorary Editor, responsible for the annual issue, Volume 131, of the *Proceedings*, with support from **Assoc. Prof. Julien Louys**. After manuscripts for Volume 131 closed, Assoc. Prof. Louys agreed to take on the role of Honorary Editor for 2023 with Dr Miskiewicz as Associate Editor.

**Ben Lodge** was appointed as Rangelands Coordinator but resigned as from 30 September 2022.

**Tony Van Der Ark** transferred Membership Coordinator duties to Treasurer **Dr Joseph McDowall** after 30 June, but **Dr Anne-Marie Smit**, who retired as Royal Society Newsletter Coordinator, has not been replaced. **Col Lynam** continued as Editor of the Queensland Science Network Newsletter. **Ms Shannon Robinson**, Queensland Museum's Librarian, continued in her role as the Society's Honorary Librarian.

Council Zoom meetings were held on 25 November 2021, 24 February 2022, 24 March, 26 May, 22 September and 20 October 2022. Face-to-face meetings of Council with Zoom facilities were held on 7 December (special meeting regarding Research Fund awards), the AGM on 9 December 2021 and a Strategic Planning meeting on 18 June. The majority of issues are debated via email traffic, telephone and Zoom.

During the year, the continued engagement of **Mrs Pam Lauder** as part-time (2–3 hours per week) Administration Coordinator and **John Tennock** on a retainer as Webmaster for both the Society's website and the Queensland Science Network (QSN) website have maintained the Society's administrative capacity.

## Strategic Planning

At a face-to-face meeting held on 18 June and open to members, there was a wide consensus to broaden the scope of the Society's mission statement to remove the focus on the natural sciences and broaden the fields to include other scholarly disciplines. The provisional Mission Statement is:

The Royal Society of Queensland – established in 1884 – is the State's senior scientific academy. The Society is a generalist learned organisation, seeking to uphold the standards of independent,

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evidence-led and curiosity-led enquiry. Its membership includes some of Queensland's most eminent researchers, as well as experts with senior policy experience, early-career researchers and laypeople with a general interest in the progress of knowledge. The Society speaks on behalf of a network of knowledgeable experts, bringing original knowledge to the notice of government, business, civil society, academia and the general public.

The Society provides platforms for thoughtful people committed to sharing and generating knowledge to conduct activities and publish their findings through both peer-reviewed and semi-popular web-based outlets.

A draft Strategic Plan is to be completed and available for further review by the end of 2022.

### Finances

Having exhausted its accumulated reserves during previous years, primarily to fund the publication of its *Proceedings*, the Society operated without any cash cushion (in its general account) and some special projects such as a consultancy to prepare a Rangelands prospectus and the first invoices for typesetting the regular *Proceedings* were funded by private donations by members of the Council. The office-bearers have been unsuccessful in securing significant general-purpose sponsorship.

On 7 and 8 April 2022, multiple attempts were made by scammers to access the Society's bank accounts and transfer money fraudulently to outside accounts. Several of these attempts failed because of protections built in by the Society and the bank, but one succeeded. The Treasurer and Secretary reported all this to authorities and to the bank as these transactions had been made without our knowledge and consent. All bank accounts were closed and new accounts opened. However, an amount of \$6,970 extracted from the Research Fund has not been recovered and the bank has advised that although investigations are continuing, it is unlikely that this sum will be recovered.

### Membership Roll

At 30 October 2022, the Society has 116 paid-up and honorary members, a worrisome reduction on last year's 132. There are eight Honorary Life Members: **Dr A. Bailey, Dr J. S. Jell, Dr J. O'Hagan,**

**Ms C. Melzer, Prof. C. Rose, Mr Craig Walton and Prof. Dilwyn Griffiths.** On 18 June 2022, **Emeritus Professor Angela Arthington** accepted the offer of Life Membership, to be invested at a date to be determined.

### Events

#### Members' Online Forums

A series of informal forums, instituted on 21 October 2021 with a forum on science integrity, was continued on Tuesday evenings, to allow members to share knowledge about topics of interest to them. Forums were held on the following topics: the prospect of investing Fellows (**Dr Ross Hynes**), coal seam gas (**Dr Peter Dart and Col Lynam**), seismology (**Col Lynam**) and cyber security (**Ben Scott**). Two were open to the public. We thank all presenters for volunteering. The series was then placed in abeyance as no other members apart from Councillors volunteered to present and the numbers participating did not seem to justify the workload involved in planning the events.

#### Gatton Careers Workshop

On 11 August 2022, the Society presented to a seminar at Gatton College in a series on career planning for Gatton students, organised by The University of Queensland Wildlife Association. **Dr Peter Dart** as lead presenter attended in person, and **Dr Ross Hynes, Dr Geoff Edwards** and **Col Lynam** (from London) attended online.

#### Early-career Researchers

On 18 February 2022, an online event ably MCed by **Dr Justyna Miszkiewicz** featured impressive short presentations from early-career researchers and feedback from experienced scientists in the audience. Abstracts of several of the presentations have been published in the *Proceedings*. Strong interest was registered by early-career researchers.

#### Cancelled Event

An event proposed for 28 September in the Queensland Conservatorium to celebrate a philanthropic award of AU\$10,000 for outstanding writers on social change was cancelled, with great regret on the part of the President and Council. After more than four weeks' advertising, only two attendees other than Council members had registered.

This was intended to be a novel and enterprising event co-hosted with the Royal Societies of Australia, and squarely involving the Society in the social sciences. The Society extends its apologies to **Dr Bruce Piasecki** and **Andrea Masters**, sponsors of the ‘Award for Business and Society Writing’, and to **Mr John Hardie**, President of the Royal Societies in Australia, that Brisbane was not able to fulfil the promise of this event.

### Awards

We celebrate the specific achievements of members who have warranted external recognition:

- **Harry Van Der Ark** – Accepted to study at Columbia University, USA, with Prof. Brian Greene. December 2021.
- **Dr Heather Douglas** – Outstanding Reviewer Certificate from Emerald Publishing. December 2021.
- **Dr Justyna Miszkiewicz** – Martin & Temminck Fellowship, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Netherlands, in September 2022 to research bone physiology in dwarfed insular mammals.
- **Emeritus Professor Angela Arthington** took on the eminent role of Specialty Chief Editor in the journal *Frontiers of Environmental Science – Freshwater Science*.

### Publications

#### *Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland*

The annual issue of the *Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland*, Volume 129, was completed on time and printed in January 2022. Given that all articles are now available free of charge online, a reduction in the cost of printing presentation copies (for Her Excellency our Patron’s library, statutory deposits, etc.) was expected. However, a decision to give free copies to all authors and the non-linear nature of printing costs meant that little was saved.

A Special Issue on *Preventative Health* has been foreshadowed but will be delayed. Volume 131, the 2022 annual issue, is on track to be completed and printed by the end of the year. At the date of completing this report, some eight substantive research articles had already been published online, with another seven abstracts of presentations made to

the Early-career Researchers’ event held in February 2022.

### Newsletters

Ten Members’ Newsletters were produced during the reporting period, against a target of monthly. These Newsletters are privileged to members. Newsletters are available on a members-only section of the website. The software reports that only about half of the members open their Newsletter e-mail.

Newsletters for the Queensland Science Network were paused after the eighth issue in October 2021. The Newsletter Editor, Col Lynam, has subsequently preferred to develop LinkedIn as the primary vehicle for disseminating information about general science. During the year, the LinkedIn network audience was built from two digits to more than 290. This has demonstrated the potential value of social media as a vehicle for disseminating knowledge about science and the Society’s activities, as an alternative to traditional methods.

### Occasional Papers

Council resolved to open a line of peer-reviewed ‘Occasional papers’ for scholarly-type articles that did not fit the format that made them eligible for the annual *Proceedings* or were outside its scope. Council had in mind, in particular, the half-dozen long papers written for the Rangelands initiative in October 2020. By 30 October 2022 no papers had finished navigating the editorial process. The primary reason is that authors, editors and referees have been too busy with other projects.

### Press

On 17 November 2021, *The Mandarin* online newsletter published a column by **Dr Philippa England**, “Pay Farmers For Green Actions, Not For Obeying The Law” in its premium category.

In March 2022, a message advertising the availability of the Queensland Science Network as a teaching resource was included in the Department of Education’s regular newsletter to its teaching fraternity.

The irreversible damage that mining for coal seam gas can wreak on cropping land through subsidence was a highlight of a scientific paper published in the *Proceedings* by four members.

The ABC gave an account of this threat in a news piece published on 8 October 2022, as did *Queensland Country Life* on 10–11 October.

### Education Project

No progress was made during the year on development of new materials for the senior Queensland science curriculum as no funding was secured.

### Rangelands Policy Dialogue

The Rangelands Policy Dialogue launched in July 2019 was paused at the end of December 2020. At the end of the reporting year no funds had been secured to allow this Dialogue to be given the organisational support that it warrants, and the Dialogue remains in limbo.

### The Royal Society of Queensland Websites

During the year, the Society added the archive of the Queensland STEM Environment Network to its QSN website and has now added the domain [www.queenslandstem.au](http://www.queenslandstem.au) with the agency of member and Syllabus Coordinator **Kay Lembo**. Domains controlled by the Society are now:

[www.royalsocietyqld.org](http://www.royalsocietyqld.org)  
[www.royalsocietyqld.org.au](http://www.royalsocietyqld.org.au)  
[www.scienceqld.org](http://www.scienceqld.org)  
[www.scienceqld.org.au](http://www.scienceqld.org.au)  
[www.policyqld.org.au](http://www.policyqld.org.au)  
[www.rangelandsqld.org.au](http://www.rangelandsqld.org.au)  
[www.queenslandstem.au](http://www.queenslandstem.au)

During the year, the Society declined to take up an offer by the domain registration authorities to register the first six of the above domains as “.au” without the “.org”. Council judged that the risk of being held to blackmail by domain harvesters was low.

### Research Fund

This year, some 21 applications were received for the fourth round of the Research Fund, for which \$5000 was allocated. This is more than double the previously highest number and reflects extensive advertising by our Administration Coordinator **Pam Lauder** and Research Coordinator **Col Lynam**.

Col Lynam convened an assessment panel that included **Dr Heather Douglas** and **Dr Alistair**

**Melzer** and presented the emerging conclusions to Council on 7 December.

In light of the large number of worthy applications, the President **Dr Ross Hynes** personally made an additional donation to allow a second grant. Then Council decided to allocate funds from the bequest of the late Professor Trevor Clifford supplied by the generosity of his family via family member and Society member **Kate Charters**. This allowed funding of two botanically oriented projects as well.

Four awards were made from a magnificent set of applications.

The recipients of the Trevor Clifford Bequest were:

- **Cassandra Rowe**, *Mua Island Garden Project* in Western Torres Strait, to enable her to visit the garden sites and undertake the appropriate field work and interact with people in Torres Strait; and
- **Dr David Nielsen**, *Queensland's Gardener: Walter Hill* who was responsible for setting up the Botanic Gardens and original collections of many Queensland species, to research the establishment of the Brisbane Botanic Gardens and associated collections.

The recipients of the Round 4 awards were:

- **Alexandria Mattinson**, looking at a specific disease of bananas: identification of novel peptides in Cavendish bananas during fusarium wilt infection, a horticultural biological disease-oriented project which is very relevant to Queensland and major banana producers of the world; and
- **Dr Tobias Smith**, assessing the distribution and conservation status of Australia's rarest stingless bee, *Tetragonula davenporti*.

Council agreed in principle to allocate \$5000 for a fresh round in 2022, but at year's end had not appointed a Research Coordinator.

### Final Words

The momentum of the Society's activities has been lower in the reporting year. Initiatives that are paused or proceeding at a slow rate of progress include:

- Rangelands Policy Dialogue

- Queensland curriculum materials
- Research Fund
- Monthly online forums
- Uploading fresh material to the Society, QSN and Rangelands websites
- Members' Interests page and networking
- Recruitment of members and retention of existing members
- Preventative health
- Royal Society and QSN Newsletters
- Survey of members to identify their interests and their willingness to contribute to the Society's work program.

Emphatically, this slower momentum does not apply to the publication of the annual *Proceedings*, and Council records its immense gratitude to the

Honorary Editor and Associate Editor for bringing a most excellent volume to online near-completion.

The President, Vice-President, Policy, Dr Douglas and Ben Lodge have signified their intention to stand down from Council. This should allow new leaders to refresh Council and generate momentum to more actively fulfil its unique mission.

On behalf of all The Royal Society of Queensland members, I extend our thanks to all who have been involved and hope that the future will bring opportunities to restore and introduce more activities for our Society.

Ross Hynes

President

Date: 30 October 2022

On behalf of the Council

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