



## ABACBS Annual Report

Date: October 25, 2016

For the period: April 21 to November 2, 2016

### Executive Committee members:

President:	Tony Papenfuss
Vice president:	Ashley Waardenberg
Treasurer:	Melissa Davis
Secretary:	Joshua Ho
Ordinary members:	Nicola Armstrong David Lynn Liam Fearnley (ECR Representative) Harriet Dashnow (Student Representative)

In order to align Annual General Meetings and ABACBS executive committee elections with the timing of the annual conference, this financial year and term of office was only 6 months in length. During this time, the executive committee and sub-committees have been busy and achieved a great deal.

### New executive committee

As this term saw the executive expand and 5 new committee members join, the term kicked off with the immediate past executive providing a transition document to incoming members and all members coming together for a retreat in Melbourne in July. This helped members get to know one another and set priorities for the term.

### Annual Conference

For the community in Australia to grow, it is vital for us to have a national bioinformatics and computational biology conference, and ABACBS is ideally placed to host this annual event. In 2015 the conference was held in Sydney, at the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, and was attended by ~180 registrants from across Australia.

Creating a financial safety net for the annual conference by setting aside any surpluses generated is an important part of ensuring the future sustainability of the conference, particularly during periods when funding and sponsorship may be difficult to source. The ABACBS 2015 Conference in Sydney generated a surplus of \$8,856.60. The surplus from the Australian Bioinformatics Conference (ABiC) in Melbourne in 2014 was \$2,946.00. Together this positions the ABACBS Annual Conference with a positive funding position of \$11,802.60 at the end of the 2016 financial year. We appreciate that the current conference surplus has been made possible by the hard work and dedication of the Bioinformatics and Computational Biology community, in particular those organising the conference, and thank everyone for their involvement.

The 2016 conference is being held in Brisbane, partnering with the B<sup>3</sup> Symposium, and hosted by Queensland University of Technology. The co-convenors are Tony Parker (QUT) and Nic Waddell (QIMR-Berghoffer). AB<sup>3</sup>ACBS 2016 is on track to be an excellent conference with a number of satellite events, and for the first time will be hosting this Annual General Meeting for the society. ABACBS 2017 will be located in Adelaide with David Lynn as one of the co-convenors. We have also created the role of ABACBS Conference Coordinator, currently held by Mirana Ramialison, and invited a member of the next organising committee, Katherine Pillman, onto the current one. These positions serve to help develop and share experience and resources to help run the conference in the future.

## Sponsorship

In the financial year ending 2016, ABACBS was generously supported by a large number of sponsors. We invoiced our supporters for \$69,127 in sponsorship in FYE16. In particular, we recognise the generous support of EMBL Australia, which for the second year provided \$46,000 in sponsorship to the society. This in turn enabled us to sponsor the Winter School in Mathematical and Computational Biology (\$13,000) and BioinfoSummer (\$13,000). This would not be possible without a major sponsor. Other sponsors supported the national conference, the COMBINE symposium, and training events throughout the year.

## Advocacy

Advocating on behalf of the Bioinformatics and Computational Biology community is an important role for the society. During this term, ABACBS made submissions to three reviews on behalf of its members. These were:

1. [Medical Research Future Fund](#)
2. [NHMRC Structural Review Expert Panel](#)
3. Bioplatforms (BPA) Consultations

For the MRFF and NHMRC reviews, the executive first sought views from members via email and the society's Slack forum was used to collect input, which was then incorporated into submissions. The timing of these reviews was challenging for everyone involved, but it is important that we can now collectively advocate to funding agencies and others for our profession. Thank you everyone for your valued inputs.

For the BPA Consultations, ABACBS was represented by several executive members.

## Policy development

ABACBS is still a young society, which presents us with challenges related to the lack of established guidelines for how to conduct the business of the society; however it also represents an amazing opportunity for us to create a society that reflects the values and culture of our vibrant community. We have started to capture the lessons learnt over the course of the last two years, as well as our aspirations for the society, as a set of policies that will help ABACBS run smoothly in the future, while keeping alive the vision outlined by the community when it was founded.

A number of policies were written during this term. The following policies, guidelines or agreements were written and accepted by the executive committee:

- [Gender Equity and Diversity Policy](#): Defines the gender equity and diversity policies governing the society. It is based on, but extends, the approach we applied to the ABACBS 2015 conference.
- [Code of Conduct](#): Describes acceptable conduct at society events and a social media policy. The policy was based on the example anti-harassment policy from the Geek Feminism wiki, created by the Ada Initiative and other volunteers, and on the SKA Organisation Code of Conduct.
- [AMSI Membership Agreement](#): This reciprocal agreement establishes ABACBS as an organisational member of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute and makes AMSI an organisational member of ABACBS, so that its director has voting rights.

The following policies or guidelines have been drafted, but are not yet finalised and approved:

- ABACBS Annual Conference Policies and Procedures
- ABACBS Awards and Prizes

## Sub-committees

The following subcommittees (advisory and formal) have been established to date:

- COMBINE Student subcommittee (formal)
  - Led by Jane Hawkey, COMBINE has remained highly active and contributed significantly towards the development of a vibrant national community. COMBINE now has six active branches across Australia: Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Perth and Hobart. 17 events were run in 2016, including 8 social events, 2 seminars, and 7 workshops.
- Education and Training subcommittee (formal)
  - This committee is chaired by Annette McGrath. Its aim is to enhance coordination and cooperation between those involved in bioinformatics training nationally.
- Sydney Bioinformatics Research Symposium (SBRS; formal)

- SBRS has been a community-driven annual conference for bioinformaticians in NSW and ACT since 2011. Part of the vision for ABACBS is to support events, develop community and enhance sustainability. Since it aligns well with these aims, SBRS was officially established as a subcommittee of ABACBS in 2016 providing access to banking, online commerce and insurance. The 2016 Symposium was attended by over 120 participants. Thanks to the generous support of local institutions and ABACBS, which also sponsored the event, SBRS was again run as a free event.
- Web subcommittee (advisory)
  - Earlier this year a web subcommittee was formed under Torsten Seemann to provide a recommendation on the best approach to enhancing the society's website, in particular to support annual membership fees. The executive is working with the web subcommittee to identify the best approach.

## External Relationships

As the Australian national society for Bioinformatics (as well as computational biology) ABACBS is the Australian member of the Association of Asian Societies for Bioinformatics (AASBi). This umbrella organisation is responsible for the organisation and hosting of the International Conference on Genome Informatics. ABACBS has also negotiated reciprocal organisational membership with the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI), and is currently exploring affiliation with the International Society for Computational Biology (ISCB).

## Newsletter

This year we started a society newsletter. This is currently collated by our Student Representative Harriet Dashnow. We envisage this newsletter as a medium to communicate news and events with the wider membership of the society. It is one way we engage the membership of the society.

## Current focus

Currently and over the next 12 months, the major focus of the executive committee will be on the following:

- Establishing annual membership fees
  - So far our society has been running on the financial support from sponsors, in particular EMBL Australia. While we will continue to seek sponsorship, it is clear that setting a membership fee is prudent for ongoing financial sustainability. A resolution will be made at the 2016 AGM to set a reasonable membership fee for 2017.
- Securing ongoing sponsorship for the society
- A functional website that can be used to manage memberships
  - So far the website has worked well for commerce, but does not provide the tools necessary for members to manage their membership details. The executive is

working closely with the Web Sub-committee to develop and implement a plan for the website.

- Creating a Professional Bioinformatics Representative position on the executive committee
- Updating the model rules to better reflect how we want the society to be governed. This will require careful rewriting of the model rules and a vote at the 2017 AGM.
- Prizes and Awards
- ISCB affiliation

Your input into developing these and other areas is highly welcome.