



Society for Reproductive Biology

Newsletter No 51 December 2003

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Chairperson's Report 2003-2004

John Hearn

This is my third yearly report and the completion of my term as Chairman of the Society. Your Committee has met five times during the year. I acknowledge and thank all members of the Committee for their hard work. We thank all members of the Society for the support and help that we have received throughout. The following indicators summarise our progress with the directions and plan that we agreed when I was elected Chairman, together with some of the new issues that have arisen.

1. **The Society's objectives.** These are leadership, support and promotion of basic, strategic and applied research and research training in reproduction, fertility and development underpinning agriculture and food, biomedicine and health, environment and conservation.
2. **Policy and Advisory activity.** The SRB and its individual members made submissions or provided advice to parliamentary or departmental committees in areas including stem cell biology and biotechnology, National Research Priorities and the current reviews of research. The Society joined the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technical Societies (FASTS), taking part in "Science Meets Parliament" days, training activities and press communications.
3. **Winning bids.** Congratulations to all our colleagues who have won major awards in national competitions for Federation Fellow, Centres of Excellence and program grants over the past year. Congratulations also to those awarded Centenary Medals. A proposal for an ARC network grant is in preparation, which would link leading research centres and will include the Society.
4. **Scientific meetings.** The quality of meetings has been excellent, with attendance increasing. This is the top priority activity for the Society. I congratulate Kate Loveland and the Program Organising Committee and Rob McLachlan, and the Local Organising Committee for the inspiring science and for the congenial environment. Mike Pickford deserves special thanks for making it happen. The Society's primary partnership with the Endocrine Society of Australia has proved very valuable. In addition, symposia held with the ASMR and COMBIO have worked well. Plans are in place for further symposia with the FSA and the ASMR.
5. **Society membership.** We must redouble our activities to recruit and retain new members. I am pleased that Sarah Robertson has taken up the Committee portfolio in this area. I acknowledge the work of Christine White in our focus on early career scientists, an essential part of our role. This is a major priority and challenge for us - each member must join in.
6. **International.** We have continued to develop alliances with the Society for Reproduction and Fertility (SRF) contact: Camilla Myers; and the Society for the Study of Reproduction (SSR) contact: Kate Loveland. Formal letters of agreement were exchanged with the SSR and we await completion of an agreement with the SRF.
7. **Communication.** The new website for the Society is gaining praise and is managed by Melinda Jasper. Please contact her with your suggestions for improvements.
8. **Publications.** The Society's partnership with Reproduction, Fertility and Development continues to thrive thanks to the work of Camilla Myers and her colleagues. It is vital that we publish our work in the journal so that both Australian and international research are strongly represented. Please let Camilla have your proposals for special issues or symposia.
9. **Sustainability.** I am delighted to report that the Society has elected outstanding leadership in Lois Salamonsen as our new Chairman and a very strong and enthusiastic Committee. I am proud to report that the Society is in great shape. Members can look forward to continued excellence and to enjoyment of the science and the Society.
10. **Thanks.** My warm thanks on behalf of all members to those committee members completing their terms: Lois Salamonsen who evolves to Chairman; Kate Loveland who served with distinction as Chair of the POC and moves to Treasurer; Chris O'Neill for his outstanding service as Treasurer who continues as Chair, LOC; and Peter Kaye. Rob Gilchrist continues as our Honorary Secretary and he and other continuing members have my heartfelt thanks. In completing my own term as Chairman, I thank you all for the privilege of serving the Society in this role over the past three years and for the enjoyment of leading a great team.

Letter from the Incoming Chairperson

Lois Salamonsen

Dear Members of SRB

It is a very great honour to have been elected as Chairman of the Society for Reproductive Biology for the next triennium and I thank you all for your support. I believe that the Society is in great shape at present and this is due in no small part to the exceptional leadership provided by my predecessor John Hearn, and also to the efforts of the committee who served with him. I thank all those people for their important contributions to the Society.

The quality of the science at our meetings is of fundamental importance to the Society and we have been served particularly well by our Programme Organising Committee, headed by Kate Loveland. Kate and her team have provided us with innovative programming and a range of exciting speakers who have often raised our awareness of areas outside our usual experience. I am confident that our new POC, headed by Sarah Robertson will be equally inventive in providing programmes that incorporate the most exciting new developments relevant to our field. They will have the full support of the incoming SRB committee. All members of the Society can take pride in the quality of our meetings: it is the work of every presenting member that contributes to this.

I believe that the most important issue currently facing our Society is that of membership. It is important that all the students and new post-doctoral scientists working in Reproductive Biology, as well as scientists with new interests, are recruited as members of our Society: a strong Society will enable us better to lobby politicians regarding issues that are critical for our discipline, including the issue of funding for research. The strength of the Society is also reflected in the quality of our meetings and clearly, the more members who are able to attend these meetings and present their new data, the better the meeting. Sarah Robertson is heading a subcommittee that is seeking to expand and broaden our membership, and we ask every current member of the Society to support this very important initiative by personally recruiting students and colleagues and encouraging them to present their work at our meetings.

The future for Reproductive Biology is bright. New technologies, such as gene manipulation and the widespread availability of animals with genes either over-expressed or deleted, are opening opportunities for scientists with a strong background in reproductive biology, while advances in methodology such as gene arrays and proteomics, are providing tools to answer basic questions in reproductive biology that were previously unattainable. Furthermore, the development of the biotechnology industry in Australia is providing mechanisms for delivering outcomes from our research to the well-being of our country in terms of the environment, medicine and veterinary practice. SRB should be a driving force behind these advances.

SRB is committed to support of our discipline and I am honoured to be serving as Chairman for the next triennium.

Lois Salamonsen

Secretary's Report

Robert Gilchrist

1. SRB Committee & Affiliates. John Hearn, Chris O'Neill and Peter Kaye completed their terms on the committee in September. On behalf of the committee I'd like to thank all three for doing a fantastic job over the past 3 years, especially John as Chair, who has left the society in a healthy state. John has assured us he will continue to serve on SRB's behalf in the important areas of science policy and representation to parliament through FASTS. Elections for the SRB Committee were held this year and all members were elected unopposed (see Table). The committee has also co-opted Darryl Russell (University of Adelaide) and Caroline Gargett (Monash University) as Ordinary Committee Members, and elected Sarah Robertson as Deputy Chairperson, all for 1 year.

	2002/2003	2003/2004
Chairperson	John Hearn	Lois Salamonsen
Deputy Chairperson	Lois Salamonsen	Sarah Robertson
Honorary Secretary	Rob Gilchrist	Rob Gilchrist
Honorary Treasurer	Chris O'Neill	Kate Loveland
Ordinary Member	Peter Kaye	Jim McFarlane
Ordinary Member	Dominique Blache	Dominique Blache
Ordinary Member	Sarah Robertson	Caroline Gargett
Ordinary Member		Darryl Russell
POC Chair	Kate Loveland	Sarah Robertson
LOC Chair	Rob McLachlan	Chris O'Neill & Gareth Evans
Student rep	Christine White	Amanda Sferruzzi-Perri
NZ Student rep	Michael Quinn	Michael Quinn
RFD rep	Camilla Myers	Camilla Myers
Communications	Melinda Jasper	Melinda Jasper
Chair Membership Sub-Committee		Darryl Russell
Chair New Investigator Award Committee	Alan Tilbrook	Alan Tilbrook

Taking on a vitally important role for the society, Sarah Robertson was elected 2004-2006 POC Chair earlier this year – congratulations Sarah. In addition Sarah took on the role of Chair of the newly formed Membership Sub-Committee, which was formed to bolster our flagging membership numbers, and now hands the Chair to Darryl Russell. Please assist this committee where possible in increasing our membership.

2. 2004 Founders' Lecturer. The following nominations were received: Robin Tervit, John Aitken, Jeffrey Robinson and Ian Clarke. It is with pleasure that I announce that Professor John Aitken has been elected the 2004 Founders' Lecturer.

Treasurer's Report

Chris O'Neill

The 2002-3 year was financially successful for the Society, resulting in a trading surplus of \$16,069. This was achieved by a good increase in revenue and

reduced expenditure. New income arose from (a) a new sponsorship from the Innovative Dairy Products CRC, and (b) a profit from our contribution to the AHMRC. Revenue was supported by a healthy surplus from the Adelaide Annual Scientific meeting.

Improvements in expenditure were achieved by tight control of operating costs and supported by having a local Founders Speaker. Investment income remained modest due to prevailing market conditions but was positive, which contrasts favourably with many other Societies. Given the current historically low interest rates on offer it has been decided to increase the balance of the Society's assets invested in a managed equity fund by \$20,000.

The total Net Assets of the Society increased to a healthy \$114,706, providing the Society with financial security for its programme in the immediate future. \$22685 of these assets is allocated to the T.J. Robinson Scholarship Fund, which receives a proportional share of the Society's investment income each year.

The committee has decided to continue membership of FASTS, hence the levy applied to dues to cover this membership will remain in place. It has also been agreed that members will in future be able to pay subscription fees for 3 and 5 years in advance. This will provide the advantage of not having to remember to pay the fees each year, and will also entitle the member to avoid future increases in dues during the period of their subscription.

The Executive has reappointed ACTS to continue to provide Secretarial and Financial services for the Society for this financial year. I thank Mr David Hinds for Auditing the Society's accounts. I wish Kate Loveland, your new Treasurer, ever success in the role.

Postgraduate Student Representative's Report

Christine White

Postgraduate students continue to make a major contribution to the SRB and its Annual Scientific Meetings. New initiatives have been implemented during the year to improve the experience of student membership of SRB:

Junior Scientist Award (JSA) Renamed 'SRB New Investigator Award'

Website Student Links page

Postgraduate Student Representatives New Zealand Postgraduate Student Representative Michael Quinn (PhD student, University of Otago, NZ) has been appointed to act as a local contact, to advertise the benefits of membership to NZ students and to work with the new Postgraduate Student Representative, Amanda Sferuzzi-Perri (PhD student, University of Adelaide) to bring any concerns or

requests from these students to the Executive Committee. Both will hold this position for 2004/2005.

Student Events at the 2003 Scientific Meeting The Student Lunch Roundtable was an opportunity for postgraduates to meet the 2003 Founders' Lecturer, Professor Tom Fleming. Students from around Australia and New Zealand joined in a discussion of Professor Fleming's research on mammalian embryo development and his career in reproductive biology. This informal session was also a chance for students to share their experiences of postgraduate research and gain confidence in interacting with more senior members of the society. The Students Annual Meeting was held to discuss ways in which to improve the experience of student membership of SRB, followed by the SRB/ESA Student BBQ.

I encourage all students to become more involved in their society, by renewing their membership, attending the Annual Scientific Meetings, supporting all the Student Events and contacting their new Postgraduate Student Representatives - Amanda in Australia or Michael in New Zealand - with any suggestions or concerns.

New Investigator Award 2003

Alan Tilbrook

The six finalists for the SRB New Investigator Award provided us with an outstanding scientific session at the scientific meeting in Melbourne in September. All of the presentations were excellent and each of the finalists presented science of high quality. The Committee had an extremely difficult task in determining a winner of the Award. It is an exceptional effort to be selected as a finalist for the New Investigator Award from a highly competitive field of candidates and the Committee and the Society would like to congratulate all of the finalists and to encourage them to continue with their high quality research in reproductive biology. The finalists for the SRB 2003 New Investigator Award were John Bromfield, Rachel Chan, Natalie Hannan, Alexandra Harvey, Amanda Sferruzzi-Perri and David Sharkey.

The winner of the SRB New Investigator Award for 2003 is Amanda Sferruzzi-Perri from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Adelaide. The title of Amanda's paper was "IGF-2 mediates the effect of hypoxia on human cytotrophoblast outgrowth". CONGRATULATIONS Amanda.

Program Organising Committee Chair's Report

Kate Loveland

The Conference Program this year featured:

- 4 SRB Symposia (1 international speaker)
- 1 Joint Symposium with ESA
- Founders' Lecturer, Tom Flemming
- New Investigator Finalist Award Session

- President's Lecturer
- Joint SRB/ESA Male and Female Reproduction Sessions
- Late Breaking Science Session
- Student Roundtable with Founders' Lecturer
- 9 sessions of oral presentations

There were 91 abstracts accepted for presentation this year (75 in 2002/72 in 2001).

Integration with ESA has been amicable and productive over the past three years, and I would like to thank the ESA POC Chair, Leon Bach, for this.

Mike Pickford's support (and other ASN staff) has made things run smoothly throughout the year.

Camilla Myers facilitated Proceedings proofreading and publication to enable us to achieve a high standard of Program Book production. Online access ahead of the conference has reduced workload and costs associated with the conference.

Session sponsorship was good this year, with \$8.5K coming directly to SRB.

Thank you to many members of the POCs and the SRB Committee for their support during the planning and implementation of the past three years. John Hearn, Chris O'Neill and Lois Salamonsen each deserve a hearty thank you from me.

Local Organising Committee Chair's Report

Kate Loveland

Attendance as of 10/09/03 (Adelaide 02/Brisbane 01 figures in brackets)

Full reg members	63	(53/ 60)	\$ 445
Full Reg non-members	21	(11/ 5)	\$ 530
Early members	155	(159 / 170)	\$ 370
Early non members	44	(24 / 25)	\$ 445
Full Student reg members	16		\$ 260
Full Student reg non-members	5		\$ 320
Early Student reg members	82		\$ 195
Early Student reg non-members	19		\$ 260
Student 1 day registration	1		\$ 150
Invited Speaker registration	18		\$ 000

Full registrants	301	(263 /286)	
Student registrants	122	(116/115)	
TOTAL Scientist REGISTRATIONS:	423		

Day, Trade and Guest

Day Registrations	25	(12 / 10)	\$ 205
Complimentary Trade passes	106	(75 / 60)	\$ 000
Additional Trade Guest passes	8	(14 / 10)	\$ 260
TOTAL Full REGISTRATIONS:	538	(525 /498)	

Approximately 40% of registrations as of August were SRB delegates this year (30% and 28% in 2002 and 2001, respectively).

Meeting sponsors

- Advertising \$4,250
- Sponsors \$12,500
- CRC for Innovative Dairy Products \$3K direct to SRB

- Pest Animal Control CRC \$3K direct to SRB
- RFD \$1K for Founders' Lecturer direct to SRB
- Serono \$1.5 K for New Investigator Award Finalist Prize direct to SRB

Exhibition 22 booths at \$100,386 gross income. Venue hire \$57,532

Other issues Joint flier, registration and accommodation well integrated between the ADS/ADEA and SRB/ESA this year. Dual registration discount (\$40) added to encourage registration SRB/ESA and ADS/ADEA; 32 delegates chose this.

Future SRB Scientific Meetings

2004 Sydney jointly with ESA, 22nd-25th August. ASN are conference organisers.

2005 Perth jointly with ESA, 4th-7th September. ASN are conference organizers. SRB/ESA have received a \$25K grant from the WA government to support the combined meeting. Thanks in particular to Mike Pickford and ASN for playing a large role in securing this grant.

2004 SRB Annual Scientific Meeting

Final Abstract Submission Date: 9 May 2004
Early Bird Registration Deadline: 30 June 2004

Recent Awards

Congratulations to recent PhD graduates of Professor Arun Dharmarajan, School of Anatomy and Human Biology, University of Western Australia, Perth:
Dr. Ricky Lareu *Regulators of Apoptosis in the Rat Corpus Luteum*.
Dr. Michael Abdo *Tumour Necrosis Factor-Alpha Signal Transduction In Rat Corpus Luteum Apoptosis*.

Scholarships & Positions

PhD Scholarships available within The Research Embryology Group, Reproductive Medicine Unit, University of Adelaide.

The Research Embryology Group has several PhD projects investigating the legacy of the environment encountered during oocyte maturation and early embryo development on subsequent fetal and placental growth and neo-natal outcomes. Funding for this work is supported largely by an NHMRC Programme Grant and a NIH grant. We are seeking motivated post-graduates who would like to study for their PhD in this fascinating area to contact Dr Jeremy Thompson on 08 82228408 or 0408849172.

PhD Scholarships available within The University of Waikato.

Chemistry, Biochemistry, Chem/Biochemical Engineering, Animal Science or Pharmacy graduates. Two PhD scholarships are available in a multi-disciplinary international team investigating slow-release drug delivery technologies for ruminant animals.

Contact Assoc Prof Conan Fee, Department of Materials & Process Engineering, University of Waikato, Ph 64 7 838 4266 or Fax 64 7 838 4835
Email c.fee@waikato.ac.nz
Web <http://mape.waikato.ac.nz>

Postdoctoral Fellows & Research Assistants

positions available within Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research

Several positions are available for highly motivated individuals to work in the area of male reproductive biology and contraceptive development at research institutes located at Monash Medical Centre in Clayton. **Project 1** involves a proteomic and genomic analysis of spermatogenesis. A background in proteomics would be highly desirable. **Project 2** involves the identification of key regulators of spermatogenesis using linkage techniques. A strong genetics background and experience with linkage analysis is desirable.

Applications should be sent to Assoc Prof Robert McLachlan, Male Reproductive Research Group, PO Box 5152, Clayton, Victoria, 3168. Robert.McLachlan@phimr.monash.edu.au by the 19th December 2003.
Enquiries phone (03) 9594 3553.

NHMRC Research Officer position available within Endocrine Cell Biology, Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research

A Research Officer position supported by NHMRC research grant is available from January 2004 at Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research, located at Monash Medical Centre, Clayton, Victoria. Newly graduated PhD scientists with experience in electrophysiology, single cell Ca^{2+} measurement, and/or endocytosis/exocytosis measurement are encouraged to apply. Experience and technical skills in molecular biology, and in particular, quantitative PCR and siRNA are advantages. Skills in receptor study and small animal handling would also be useful for the project.

For further details please contact Dr Chen Chen
Phone 95944371

Email: chen.chen@phimr.monash.edu.au

Applications should be sent to: Dr Chen Chen, PHIMR, PO Box 5152, Clayton, Victoria 3168 and should include CV and contact details of 3 referees.

Conference Announcements

Joint European Conference in Reproduction and Fertility incorporating the 2004 Annual Conference: Society for Reproduction and Fertility

Monday April 5 to Wednesday April 7 2004

This conference, which is to be hosted by the Veterinary Faculty of Ghent University, will provide a European forum for the presentation and discussion of reproductive science, and its applications to both human and veterinary medicine.

For further information please visit the conference website at www.srf-reproduction.org/events/conf2004 or email SRFSecretariat@procon-conferences.co.uk

Society Membership

Membership Drive

Sarah Robertson

Membership in the SRB has been in decline over the past few years and this initiated an effort to recruit new members and encourage lapsed members to renew their membership. To achieve this, an analysis of financial/unfinancial members has been generated and an email campaign was initiated in August. Letters highlighting the benefits of membership have been sent to almost 100 potential new members identified in SA, Vic and NSW. Already we have seen an excellent response with a 10% increase in the number of paid subscriptions since June. The other states and NZ will be targeted over coming months.

It is essential that we maintain this momentum to achieve continued growth in our membership base and to maintain the strength and quality of collegiate interaction and scientific discourse for which our society is renowned.

To this end all members must encourage their colleagues, and especially their post-graduate students and postdoctoral staff, to support the SRB and reap the benefits of membership in Australia and New Zealand's premier society for scientific research in reproductive biology.

Membership forms are easily accessible on the SRB website at <http://www.srb.org.au> or contact: Australian Convention and Travel Services
Phone (02) 6257 3299 Fax (02) 6257 3256
email asrb@ausconvservices.com.au

NEW IN 2004 - Affiliate Membership of the SSR

Affiliate membership of the Society for the Study of Reproduction has been arranged to encourage closer links between SRB members and their American colleagues and has been designed to provide many benefits for SRB members, including:

- Better opportunities for communication with SSR members through access to newsletters and electronic messaging
- Cheaper subscriptions to *Biology of Reproduction*, the official journal of the SSR
- Advance notification and member rates for the Annual Scientific Meeting

Affiliate membership of the SSR costs US\$75.

The privileges of affiliate membership are:

1. Electronic access to *Biology of Reproduction*
2. Electronic version of the Newsletter
3. Early notification of the Annual Meeting and Call for Abstracts
4. SSR member rates for the Annual Meeting (a saving of US\$135 in 2002)

Notification on how to become an SSR affiliate member will be sent out via srbmail and advertised in the newsletter as soon as the details are confirmed.

Note that full membership of the SSR remains available to SRB members at US\$150. The additional privileges of full membership are:

1. Member rates for publication in *Biology of Reproduction* (US\$60 per page for members; US\$100 per page for non-members)
2. CiteTract and SSREPRO
3. Nominating, voting, holding office and service on SRB committees

Reproduction, Fertility and Development

Camilla Myers Managing Editor

Reproduction, Fertility and Development has had a strong year, particularly with the signing of the agreement with the International Embryo Transfer Society to publish their Annual Conference Proceedings in the journal from 2004 – a hard-won battle to wrest the Proceedings from *Theriogenology*. This will have a beneficial effect on the international profile and circulation of the journal and is likely to improve the impact factor significantly.

The impact factor rose this year back up to 0.959 and I anticipate further improvement next year with increased citations from two special issues published in 2002. This is still disappointingly low and is frustrating because of the 'Catch-22' of not being able to improve the situation without publishing exciting, highly citing papers, and at the same time not being able to attract those papers because of the low impact factor. Our aim is to improve the impact factor with increased web visibility, the IETS Proceedings and by publishing themed issues. However, SRB members should remember that they can also help: if each member submitted one good paper a year to RFD, the impact factor would undoubtedly improve significantly, because some of the best reproduction and developmental science is done here in Australia and New Zealand.

The turnaround times for submitted papers have been improved with our average submission-to-first decision time now 7 weeks and our acceptance-to-publication time also only 8 weeks.

Submissions in 2003 have been steady but our systems are able to handle many more papers. SRB members will enjoy the benefits of fast turnaround times and rapid publication when they submit to the journal.

From January next year, RFD will be published online in fully searchable XML-coded format (as well as in PDF format) and will be linked with Cross-Ref to enable web-linking between journals from and to RFD papers. This is an exciting innovation that will mean much greater www visibility for the journal and likely increased citations.

In addition, I am pleased to announce that RFD will now make PDFs of papers freely available to authors, with permission to post them on their websites and to email them widely to their colleagues.

Finally, RFD was proud to sponsor the Founders' Lecture at this year's Annual Scientific Meeting of the Society and looks forward to being able to help the Society further as the journal's position improves.

Communications Officer

Melinda Jasper

Website Please visit the new website <http://www.srb.org.au>, we encourage suggestions on content to be able to provide members with the information they seek.

Please note the old website is no longer active:
<http://numbat.murdoch.edu.au/spermatology/index.htm>

Newsletter I invite all members to submit items for inclusion in the newsletter. Please forward scholarship and position notices, in addition awards recently distributed can be announced in the newsletter, meetings or articles that may be of interest to SRB members. The newsletter is published twice a year, the next being in February/March 2004. The deadline for submissions will be the end of January 2004. Newsletters are also available as pdf files on the new website.

SRB Mail SRBmail is an excellent facility to communicate with SRB members about a whole range of issues, including fellowship positions, symposia and satellite meetings. Please make the most of this membership benefit. New members please note you are not automatically placed on the mailing list, please register your details, see below.

To post a message to all the list members, simply send your message to:
asrblist@mailman.med.usyd.edu.au

To subscribe to the asrblist mailing list, register your details at:
<http://mailman.med.usyd.edu.au/mailman/listinfo.cgi/asrblist>

Please contact me if you have any queries in regards to the newsletter or website.

Article from Australasian Science Magazine

Snow Barlow

"Reckless Squandering of Talent" Hurts Knowledge Economy

The government must dramatically improve career paths for young scientists says Snow Barlow, new President of the Federation of Australian Science and Technology Societies (FASTS).

Securing realistic careers for scientists after graduation is the most challenging and unaddressed issue for Australia's labour force in science, engineering and technology (SET). Currently, markets for jobs in universities and CSIRO are stagnant, forcing postdoctoral scientists into accepting a succession of contracts for only 1-2 years.

Chronic uncertainty regarding employment is devastating for scientists at an age where their peers in other fields are settling down on comfortable salaries, getting married, having children and buying a house.

This situation was poignantly demonstrated at October's Science Meets Parliament Day in Canberra. Two Senators learned first-hand about this grim reality on graciously allowing two young postdoctoral scientists to use their computers to download the list of grants released that day by the Australian Research Council (ARC). The senators were shocked to find themselves thrust into a grief-counselling role with the two unsuccessful applicants.

Bursting into tears in a senator's office registers somewhere between a personal setback and tragedy, but it sure makes a point to those responsible for science funding. (Only about one in five applicants to the ARC was successful.) It underlines Australia's reckless squandering of talent of those people who collectively hold the answers to our economic and environmental future.

One of the tearful scientists is unable to enter the housing market because bank managers remain unconvinced by 2-year contracts. The other is looking at a new city, a new job, and possibly a right-angle change of career - out of science.

A strong corps of creative, passionate and well-trained SET people is a key pillar of "Backing Australia's Ability", the government's innovation statement in 2001. Yet, the interim report of the government's follow-up Science Mapping task force could not hide the fact that, as other OECD nations move more strongly towards knowledge economies, the impact of Australian science is declining, just

when we needed a boost. We now face intense competition globally for intellectual resources in SET.

Professor Kwong Lee Dow's recent Review of Teaching and Teacher Education has highlighted a decrease in students selecting a second science subject at high school, as well as an acknowledged shortage of teachers with science degrees.

While Education Minister Dr Brendan Nelson's higher education reforms attempt to redress the shortage of teachers through special incentives, they do not address the effect of higher HECS fees on science teachers who will earn exactly the same as their colleagues of similar age and experience who teach other disciplines.

The Nelson reforms also present dilemmas for university science faculties.

In the past decade more expensive science courses have fared poorly in increasingly cash-strapped universities, where Vice-Chancellors have often preferred the more popular and lucrative business courses. The ability to increase income through raising HECS will help to lift the quality of science education, but higher HECS debts will deter students from enrolling in science.

The government's Federation Fellowships were launched to attract our best scientists home, but has evolved into a program seeking to stem the flow of our talent out of Australia as well. This year, the scheme did not even fill its quota of 25 fellowships. Further, some of the eight overseas scientists offered fellowships are having reservations about accepting them. The nation needs a dramatic review of its education development and retention of SET personnel if we are to become competitive in the knowledge economy. This must be a key component of the next phase of Backing Australia's Ability. The provision of career paths for highly trained postdoctoral scientists in whom the nation has invested heavily, requires urgent attention. Otherwise, they may be lost to science at great personal cost to themselves and the nation.

Professor Snow Barlow is Head of the School of Agriculture & Food Systems in the University of Melbourne. conScience is a column for Australians to express forthright views on national issues. Views expressed are those of the author.

Contacts: Snow Barlow: (0407) 251 574, (03) 8344 5007 (Melbourne University)
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