FASTS Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies

Executive Director's Report on SmP 2009

Summary

SmP 2009 – the 10th time that it has been presented - went very smoothly with very positive responses from the overwhelming majority of participants. The briefing day and forums program were both very strong. The dinner was the equal largest we have done and the MC and keynote speaker were terrific.

The number of Parliamentarians participating in meetings was relatively low due in part to the unusually busy sitting week. However, participation remains reasonably solid and certainly way ahead of similar events.

The key changes this year were:

- More group work at the briefing day (which changed the networking dynamic)
- Increasing the program for the second day by running two breakfasts, four fora (including the breakfasts)
- Three of the fora were webcast

There are a couple of issues that warrant examination.

- Focus on early and mid-career researchers meant we were probably a bit light on for 'heavy hitters' in some fields
- Four societies went through the exercise of selecting nominees but then failed to ensure their nominees were registered.

SmP 2009 - at a glance

Parliamentarians	
No participation	106
Dinner only	7
Meeting only	61
Dinner and meeting	52
Presentations and for a	2
Meetings with senior staffers	4
Total meetings*	116
Scientists in meetings	165
Attendance at dinner	310
Attendance at breakfasts	90+
Non-Parliamentarian participation	293
Attendance at for a	170+

(*One meeting included 2 Senators)

Sponsors

There were 14 sponsors for this years SmP realizing $89,500 - $3,200 less than 2008 but pretty much in line with past 3 – 4 years.

I did not ask Medicines Australia, InnovationXchange or the RRRC to sponsor this year. The ATN universities declined the invitation due to financial pressures.

AIMS was a new (silver) sponsor, ATSE increased their contribution from silver to gold and Research Australia rejoined after 4 years out.

This figure includes a notional $35,000 allocation from the quantum of the DIISR grant.

The sponsors were:

AAS	DIISR
AIMS	DSTO
ANSTO	Go8 Universities
ARC	NHMRC
ATSE	NTEU
Australian Synchrotron	Research Australia
CSIRO	

In addition the Office of Nanotechnology in DIISR sponsored the nanotechnology forum.

Participation - Members

Participants came from 47 member organisations this year. This was four more than last year and 2 more than 2006. However the data are not reliable as some participants are almost certainly members of more than one society/association and it is not known which other 'hats' could be worn.

I am concerned that four societies selected nominees but then failed to ensure they registered despite four reminder emails. These nominees contacted me with less than a week to go requesting to register (including two on the Friday afternoon prior) but that is far too late for me to revise yet again the meeting schedule.

Three of the societies were quite philosophical about it; two of these explicitly acknowledging they simply assumed their nominees would read the e-mail they forwarded which said that nominees needed to go to log onto the provided URL to register.

One member of one society has been quite aggressive about the situation and intends to raise continuing membership of FASTS in response.

I also note that only 24 people had registered by the deadline of 20 February.

Participation – registrants

There were 165 registrants for meetings with Parliamentarians (including sponsor nominees).

112 registered as early/mid-career researchers (this is the first time we have explicitly asked this question on the registration form). Of these, 2 were Professors and 4 Assoc Professors. Of the 53 non-early/mid-career; 12 were non-academics (eg CEOs/marketing people from firms, CRCs or societies); 12 were Professors and 3 Assoc Profs.

There were 23 people who registered as students or postdocs, up from 18 last year (not including sponsor nominees). We don't have adequate data for previous years but I felt that they were the youngest cohort we have had (but that could just be me getting older !)

The total number of registrants, sponsor nominees and industry participants in SmP was 293 – the second highest ever, due in part to the expanded fora sessions.

Participation in SmP (excluding Parliamentarians and staff)										
Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Scientists	175	187	186	162	260	316	272	255	265	293

Meetings
There were 116 scheduled meetings this year – one of the lowest we have had. As per usual, there were meetings cancelled on the day. Some of these have been taken into account with the data but this year because of the extended question time there were a number of cancellations that I was not advised of so the actual number is probably closer to 110.

There were a number of factors that reduced the number of meetings (quite apart from the ever present threat of diminishing returns from any regular event).

This was the last sitting week prior to the autumn break. Normally that is not a particularly big deal (there is always a very heavy legislative schedule at the end of June and December) but the Government had major legislation this time, notably *Fair Work*, and the Senate had quite a few inquiries on the boil. All Ministers were heavily involved in what will certainly be the most difficult budget round sine 1996.

In addition, on the day House of Reps question time went past 4.00pm, which is pretty unusual and there was many divisions in the Senate including a recount after the alcopops debacle when one Senator failed to turn up for the division.

This resulted in a number of delayed and cancelled meetings (although interestingly a number of meetings went way overtime because of the delays as Parliamentarians wanting to continue the discussion (I am aware of 4 meetings that went for an hour and a half).

There were less meetings with Ministerial staffers this year as expertise descriptions did not seem well correlated with the sharper focus required for meetings with staffers.

Participation – Parliamentarians					
	2009	**2008**	**2007**	**2006**	**2005**
Did not participate	**106**	**92**	**108**	**98**	**83**
Participated in meetings	61	61	64	71	78
Participated in meetings and attended dinner	52	60	49	48	50
Attended dinner only	7	5	3	8	6
Meetings with advisors	4	11	4	6	9
Participated forums, breakfasts etc	2	4	1	6	4
Total meetings	116	132	116	124	147
Total Parliamentarians	226	226	226	226	225
% Participation	**53%**	**59.3%**	**52.2%**	**56.6%**	**63.1%**

The number of Parliamentarians declined to 53% with slightly less than 50% involved in meetings.

Total number of Parliamentarians Participation in SmP 1999 - 2009										
Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Parliamentarians (226 total)*	139	155	142	130	151	142	128	118	136	120

- *There were 225 Parliamentarians at the time of SmP 2005*

Topics
There was a change in methodology for scientists selecting topics. Participants were selected to nominate up to 4 topics from 1 to 4. This was done to try and get a better sense of where expertise actually lay, as it was not uncommon in previous years for participants to select 10 or more topics. There was a real shortage of people in climate science and energy and an overabundance of those

who did not fit any of the topics but who were primarily researchers at universities in physical and medical sciences.

Topic	Parlia-mentarians	Scientists
Climate Change		
Climate change and statistics – understanding long-term climate change trends	26	11
What does stabilising atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions at 450ppm really mean?	20	2
Adapting to climate change		
Impacts of climate change on human health	12	**4**
Adapting agriculture to climate change	28	12
Climate change and urban infrastructure	18	6
Land clearing, reforestation and carbon capture	24	2
Energy		
Cleaner, more efficient fossil fuel technologies	22	**3**
Renewable and low carbon emission energy	33	10
Environment		
Health of the Murray-Darling	13	3
Environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity	3	9
Analysing and managing bio-security risks	6	3
Maintaining the integrity of the oceans	8	8
Public Health		
Genetic technologies – new developments in human health	8	7
Obesity and nutrition	13	7
Heart disease – the number one killer for men and women	11	4
Defence And Security		
Defence science and technology	13	9
Science and mathematics education		
What do scientists and mathematicians want from a national curriculum?	7	13
Manufacturing		
Green car R&D	9	6
Developing innovative, low-carbon technologies to replace high emission products and processes	12	5
niche manufacturing and export of scientific instruments (eg sophisticated, cutting edge instruments for a wide range of applications including industrial process controls, environmental monitoring and medical devices).	5	4
Industry R&D		
Support for commercialising new technologies (R&D tax credits, pre-seed funding, collaboration)	13	6
Other	6	30

Briefing Day

The briefing day on Tuesday 17 of March took place in the Members Dining Room, Old Parliament House.

The presenters were:

- Senator Eric Abetz – shadow Minister for Industry, Innovation, Science and Research
- Professor Ken Baldwin (FASTS President
- Niall Byrne (science communicator)
- Professor Meredith Edwards
- Professor John Foster, Economist at UQ and panellist on the Cutler review of innovation.
- Dr Richard Dennis (Director of the Australian Institute)
- Dr Michael Green (DIISR)

- Andrew MacIntosh (Centre of Climate Law, ANU)
- Sophie Morris (*Australian Financial Review*)
- Jane Nicholls (former advisor to Senator Kim Carr)
- Anne O'Neill (OSMR-NSW)
- Bradley Smith (Executive Director, FASTS)
- Ashley Wells (Associate, Hawker Britten)
- Dr Gary White (head of R&D, auto CRC)

This year's program continued the shift of the past few years to greater emphasis on professional development over and above preparation for this SmP. Foster, Edwards and MacIntosh, in particular, provided broad perspectives on the interface of politics, science, policy, economics and public engagement.

The session with Morris, Green and Nicholls also provided valuable insights into the working day and thus the timelines of media, political advisors and senior bureaucrats.

A couple of points that could have been bought out better were;

a) we were trying to provide skills and insights about how the policy and political process *is* – not making any claims as to how it *ought* to be.
b) There was probably too much emphasis on the quick-trigger, short time frame political and policy processes and not enough attention on how the long slow grind of how policy operates.

The primary change was the introduction of group work after lunchtime in broad topics to work up 1 – 3 key points. This was very effective at stimulating networking and that dynamic continued for the rest of the two days and created a discernable difference to previous years. (It also demonstrated how hard it is to concisely present possible policy actions based upon the insights and knowledge of the science).

Feedback on briefing day was very positive with one or two comments from scientists who thought that the messages were a bit repetitive. I would partially agree but experience shows that you need to tell the same message in different ways with different metaphors or ways of explaining, as messages resonate quite differently across the group.

SmP Dinner

Great Hall, Parliament House, Tuesday 17th of March

The keynote speaker was Professor Penny Sackett (Chief Scientist) and the MC was Natasha Mitchell (ABC Radio National). Both were excellent and arguably the best we have had in terms of style, content and timeliness.

There were 310 people at the dinner (the equal largest) including 59 Parliamentarians and 5 senior advisors (not all Parliamentarians turned up but there is no accurate actual figures as a number were in and out during the evening because of chamber duties). In addition there was a division for the House of Reps 3/4s of the way through Penny Sackett's speech, which meant somewhat of a mass walkout.

The dinner is by far the single biggest expense of SmP but it is a worthwhile and effective centrepiece as it provides excellent networking opportunities and the chance to have long informal discussion with about 25% of our Parliamentarians.

Ancillary Events

This year there was a heavy program of ancillary events – by far the most we have offered. The quality of the forums was terrific – excellent panellists and cracking discussion. Attendance was excellent at all except the Indigenous Australia forum where we only had about 35 people. However, it took place at what turned out to be the 2nd busiest time for meetings (normally 4.00pm is quieter).

The nanotechnology, oceans and indigenous fora were all webcast by the Australian Science media Centre (see our website for the links to these webcasts). With the first two getting some media in the *Canberra Times* and the *SMH* (Penny Sackett's speech was also covered in the Fairfax papers and by AAP).

The first two fora were also conducted over a light breakfast.

Forum 1: Strategic Leadership in Science - Senate Alcove, 7.30am – 8.30am
Panel discussion: The three core questions for strategic leadership of science are: What is the demand? What is the supply side capability? How well connected are they, or not?

- Professor Penny Sackett (Chief Scientist)
- Professor Mary O'Kane (NSW Chief Scientist)
- Dr Megan Clark (CEO, CSIRO)
- Baroness Susan Greenfield (UK scientist, science communicator and member of the House of Lords)

Dr Cathy Foley (President-elect FASTS: facilitator)

Forum 2: Nanotechnology and OH&S House of Reps Alcove, 7.30am – 8.30am
Panel discussion: Nanoparticles are already used in manufacturing and research sites. But are they safe? What is the current state of play with nano particles: What do we know? What don't we know? What do we need to know?

- Dr Maxine McCall, theme leader, nanosafety, (CSIRO)
- Dr Howard Morris, Nanotechnology OHS Program Manager, Office of the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC), Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
- Steve Mullins, OHS officer, (ACTU)
- Brian Power, Chair, (ANBF)
- Paul Wright, Nanosafe (RMIT University)

Niall Byrne, *Science In Public* (facilitator)

This forum was sponsored by the Office Of Nanotechnology (DIISR).

Forum 3: Coasts And Oceans Into The Future: Australia's Marine Domain - Senate Alcove, 10.45am – 11.45am
70% of Australia is underwater following recent UN recognition of Australia's extended maritime borders. But what do we really know about this rich and complex marine resource. Some of our key institutions will outline the state of play.

- John Gunn, Chief Scientist Australian Antarctic Division - *Oceans matters*
- Neville Smith, Acting Director Bureau of Meteorology - *A Marine Nation: National Framework for Marine Research and Innovation*

- Ian Poiner, CEO Australian Institute of Marine Science - *Australian marine science and technology matters*
- Anthony Bergin, Director of Research Programs, Australian Strategic Policy Institute *Sea change: towards Australia's ocean destiny*.

Indigenous Launch 10.30am - Senate Garden
The Hon. Julia Gillard, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion launched two new publications including a guide for supervising Indigenous Students prepared by the Aboriginal Health CRC.

Indigenous science scholarship launch 11.00am – Senate Garden
The Hon. Warren Snowdon, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, announced the inaugural winner of a new science scholarship for indigenous students at DSTO.

National Press Club: Address by Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research 12.30pm – 1.30pm

The lunch was packed out with FASTS taking 200 tickets.

Forum 4: Indigenous Australia and science - Main Committee Room 4.00pm – 5.00pm
Panel discussion: There are growing connections between indigenous Australia and science in natural resource management, indigenous health and species identification. How to manage relations across the boundaries raises important challenges for intellectual property, setting science and research agendas and equitable access to science.

- Kerry Arabena (Deputy principal, AIATSIS)
- Craig James (Desert Knowledge CRC)
- Mick Gooda (Aboriginal Health, CRC)
- Dan Walker (CSIRO)

Dr Sarah Holcombe (ANU), facilitator

Feedback

FASTS do not use an evaluation form (we used to and the results were not terribly useful).

In addition to many comments on the two days, thus far I have received about 70 emails from participants and, unusually, Parliamentarians. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and I am aware that a quite a number of participants did as requested and followed-up with their Parliamentarians and a number of follow-up meetings/visits are already in the pipeline.

Three Parliamentarians' offices have contacted me seeking contact details and/or copies of the notes.

Bradley Smith
Executive Director