

THE ANZAAS MERCURY

ANZAAS: Empowering the Community with Science

∞ Issue No. 19, December 2003 ∞

Editor's Edict

Please enjoy this issue, packed with news about S&T issues. In **ANZAAS Debate** we look at Australian Museums and the issues they face. We also present news from ANZAAS and other interesting events. Also do not miss the bright breezy ANTENNA.

-Duncan Rouch

Adam's Airing



Comment From The Chair
By Paul ADAM

Genetically Modified Crops

The advances in molecular biology over the last two decades carry great promise, but have also given to considerable public concern, particularly in relation to the development and commercialization of genetically modified foods. Much of the debate has centred on perceptions of risk to human health and the possibility of the escape of either 'super organisms' or of their genes. Some of these concerns have been based on misunderstandings or misconceptions, others raise issues of substance, but ones that can be addressed. Much less attention has been paid to the indirect effects from changed agronomic practices which might result from the adoption of new, genetically modified, cultivars.

Recently, however, reports of Farm Scale Evaluations (FSEs) of genetically modified herbicide-tolerant (GMHT) crops have been published as a special issue of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B*. (Vol.358, 1777 *et seq.*). This has attracted considerable media attention, some putting considerable spin on the contents.

The studies were large scale, long-term and the results subject to detailed statistical analysis. As such they represent a major contribution to the GM debate. However, they also need to be seen in context.

The UK agricultural landscape is old in agricultural terms, but superimposed on a 'young' natural environment – a landscape which only 10,000 years ago was emerging from a glacial age, and in consequence, compared with most of Australia has fertile soils and a depauperate biota.

A high proportion of British wildlife is wholly or partly dependent on agricultural land. Weeds in agricultural crops provide habitat for a diversity of invertebrates and food for many birds. Since Victorian times the British weed flora has changed considerably - many once common arable weeds are now rare while a much less diverse suite of economically damaging weeds predominates. The British studies indicate changes in assemblages of both weeds and invertebrates in the GM crops.

Some comments in the Australian media have been along the lines of "so what – isn't the object to reduce weeds?". Certainly in Australia, agricultural weeds are not native species and there is no conservation interest in preserving weed species per se. Nevertheless agricultural land occupies a considerable proportion of Australia – particularly in some climatic zones

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ANZAAS

Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science
The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia 5005
Telephone: (08) 8303 4965 Facsimile: (08) 8303 4965
E-mail, ANZAAS: info@anzaas.org.au Web-site: http://www.anzaas.org.au
ABN: 79 883 488 910
ANZAAS Mercury, E-mail: newsletter_editor@anzaas.org.au
Editor in Chief: Duncan Rouch; ANTENNA Editor: Peter Toomer



and there is increasing recognition of the need to recognize the linkages between fragmented bushland and the agricultural matrix if biodiversity is to be conserved. To date much of the discussion has been based around the spatial distribution of bushland and the need to retain or restore corridors and stepping stones. Much less is known about the extent to which native species utilize agricultural land.

While the UK study may not be directly applicable in Australia it does highlight the need to take a very broad landscape approach to considering the possible consequences of genetic technologies. I suspect that it is likely to be the indirect effects of the availability of new genetically modified crops that have greater and longer lasting impacts than genetic modification per se. The UK work shows that the impacts may be complex and require long study to reveal and assess them.

The End of Serendipity in Science?

Curiosity driven research is increasingly under threat. It is not that today's scientists lack the curiosity of their predecessors, but that the current trends in research funding and expectations of accountability create a regime in which venturing into the complete unknown is frowned upon. Concentration of funding into national priorities is clearly important, but it has the danger of promoting 'safe' science at the expense of uncertainty. When something unexpected turns up it is increasingly difficult to pursue new lines of inquiry immediately – there is very little contingency money in today's institutions that can be used for such purposes. Many in the community (and particularly the editorial writers in certain newspapers) would see this as a good thing – public money is provided for a purpose, not to indulge scientists' whims – but the downside is that we could miss out on potentially valuable discoveries. The award of the 2003 Nobel Prize for Medicine to Sir Peter Mansfield provides an interesting case in point – his work on the application of NMR imaging to biological tissues arose as a curiosity driven sideline to other work on NMR.

My musings were triggered by reading James Lovelock's autobiography (Lovelock, J. 2000. *Homage to Gaia. The life of an*

independent scientist OUP, Oxford). As well as being the originator of the Gaia hypothesis, Lovelock has had a long and distinguished career in analytical chemistry. He is a brilliant inventor, and much of his success was the result of being able to pursue ideas even if they were peripheral to the major projects he was ostensibly engaged upon. He also attributes much of his success to his training as a classical laboratory technician before he entered university. The loss of the particular skills and abilities of laboratory technicians - indeed the near demise of technicians in most laboratories - is again something that in the long term may come to be regarded as a backward step. Lovelock also has some pungent comments on what he sees as excessive restrictions on laboratory practice resulting from industrial health and safety legislation. He argues that chemists of his generation had remarkably few accidents and, on the whole, impressive longevity, despite work practices and procedures that would not now be permitted. While there are obvious reasons for the legislation is it always applicable to research laboratories, and could it, on occasion, be counter productive? Lovelock points out that he is familiar with the odours of a great range of chemicals which today's new graduate would never have smelt. Not only is this knowledge a useful first step in analysis, it enables detection and identification of releases before serious accidents occur. I suspect that whatever the merits of this argument it is unlikely to win much support in today's litigious age. (On a personal note Lovelock's reminiscences of Nether Kellet and Bolton-le-sands in wartime brought back memories of my own childhood experiences in the same area some 20 years later).

The announcement of this year's ARC grants suggest that, for many, funding for research, be it safe or serendipitous, is absent. Congratulations to the winners, but the overall success rate of little over 20% suggests that many worthy projects remain unfounded. Unless there is a substantial injection of funds, through ARC or directly to universities, the national research capacity is likely to be further eroded.

*I would welcome any comments and suggestions for issues that could be addressed -e-mail: chair@anzaas.org.au,
Tel: (W) 02 9385 2076, (H) 02 9314 2453, FAX: 02 9385 1635*

ANZAAS News

Science Talks in Melbourne

The Victorian division has run two interesting presentations recently:

- Secrets of the Deadly Irukanji JellyFish, by Dr Ken Winkel, on 15th October.
- Quantum Mechanics: From Planck's Hypothesis to the New Era in Quantum Computing, by Associate Professor Lloyd Hollenberg. On 19th November.

For more information about these talks or future activities in Victoria, please contact Roger Brown, tel: (03) 9510 7702, or email: rfgbrown@on.the.net.au

Dear Divisions

This is your newsletter, please send us reports on your activities. Write in any style you like, but preferably in newsworthy form, like a newspaper.

Email your reports to newsletter_editor@anzaas.org.au, or post to the general secretary, see page 7.

The ANZAAS Debate - Science Museums: Spruikers or Culture Keepers?

This essay is the last in a 4 part series examining fundamental areas in the community-science interface. Science museums are important guardians and presenters of valuable scientific and technological cultural materials. Yet our museums face difficult challenges in staying relevant and maintaining adequate funding. Here Duncan Rouch investigates these challenges.

In September the Four Corners investigative program on ABC television reported on the parlous state of the Australian Museum in Sydney. Its 176 years old building is bursting at the seams with around 13 million items stored in a Dickensian condition. Lack of security over many years has allowed many valuable items to be stolen. Traffic in stolen artefacts is a growing global business that crosses all continents, including Australia¹.



Mike Archer: luckless leader of the Australian Museum.

While security is a particular issue at the Australian Museum in Sydney, it and other science museums around Australia are facing other serious pressures. These include trying to put up new exhibitions with stringent government funding, and the fight to keep the public coming through the doors as a crude way to show government that museums are relevant. We seem to be asking museums to be both spruikers and culture keepers, yet setting them up to fail at both by using short term, crude, objectives.

Spruikers and Culture Keepers

Spruiking is exemplified by selling science through a continual sequence of exhibitions presented in modern show fashion, such as with working model dinosaurs and current technology, but showing little of collections and history. That approach is mainly used by science centres, such as Questacon in Canberra, and ScienceWorks in Melbourne. These centres developed out of the imperative perceived by government to bring awareness of modern science and technology to the wider community. The premise of this approach is that science and technology have major impacts on daily life.

Questacon features 'hands-on' exhibits for young potential scientists. The presentations conducted by staff include humour and spectacular effects. This approach effectively stimulates interest in a wide variety of scientific subjects among the audience. ScienceWorks in Melbourne operates in similar fashion, to attract schools and families with younger children. This is a place for youngsters to go haring around the exhibits shouting gleefully in enjoyment.

The culture keepers are the traditional museums. These are an important part of modern city life and help the community get back in touch with our cultural heritage. Seeing where we have come from is essential to both knowing who we are and moving forward to a sustainable future. These museums collect and curate collections of natural and man-made materials, a fraction of which are on display at any one time, in more or less traditional vein in static 'glass-case' displays.

Culture keepers include the larger museums, like the Australian Museum in Sydney, Melbourne Museum,

Queensland Museum in Brisbane, and the South Australian Museum in Adelaide. These also perform important research based on their collections. Smaller museums, both in cities and regional areas also act as culture keepers, such as the Melbourne Maritime Museum. The smaller museums aid in tourism and local history, but perform little research. Museums of any size help define a place and its history –where we are and where we have come from.

Museums have been under pressure to change, since the first modern public museum opened its doors in 1683, the Ashmolean, in Oxford, England². The Ashmolean was part of the vanguard of the age of enlightenment that bloomed to a peak in the 18th century across Europe. Furthermore for nearly 200 years the Ashmolean was the centre of scientific studies in the University of Oxford. Ever since, research has been a key part of the work of major museums around the world.

The Push to Improve Attendances

Larger museums require larger funding and therefore are under higher pressure to draw good attendances. They are thus pushed to draw on the spruiking approach to some degree. Sometimes this oversteps the mark; witness Mike Archer, Director of the Australian Museum in Sydney, widely publicising a technically unfeasible research approach aimed at resurrecting the extinct Tasmanian tiger *Thylacinus cynocephalus*³. In contrast the South Australian Museum's exhibition 'Sessions; the evolution of skateboarding', currently on show, is a clever play to attract younger people through a modern item of social history.

Big museums have both sequences of new, often travelling, exhibitions, as well as their permanent displays of materials from their own collections. Travelling exhibitions are often brought in from overseas, through the international network of large museums and science centres.

These exhibitions are generally costly to produce and are selected to have potential high profiles to aid marketing, to bring in high numbers of visitors. The current high profile exhibition at the Australian Museum in Sydney is 'Gold and Sacrifice: Ancient Treasures of Peru'.

Jan Dekker, Asset Manager at another public institution, the Taronga Zoo in Sydney espouses the three modern rules. Firstly, a new exhibit must hit a consumer interest spot. Secondly, the exhibit must be marketable to get people through the door, and leave them wanting to return. Thirdly, the director must have a high public profile, to attract both media attention and sponsors. Directors well known in the community include Mike Archer, at the Australian Museum, and Tim Flannery, at the South Australian Museum.

Modern marketing may partly be a cause of museum thefts. Fossils and other materials of natural history have been portrayed as art objects with loss of their scientific integrity and value in the community.



Tim Flannery: successful leader of the South Australian Museum.

Nevertheless marketing can help museums to be maintained and grow, by building long-term relationships with all stakeholders, including the commercial sector. Ongoing relationships tend to build respect, and therefore allowing commercial sponsorship to occur without breaking the integrity of Museums.

Steve Gower, Director of Australia's Museum that attracts the largest attendance, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, also believes the Spruiker approach is best. "A museum should be vibrant, engaging, communicate well with its target audience. If it's an attic, I think it's moribund –it's pointless." Gower, also chair of the Australian Council of Museum Directors, is a man on a mission to persuade his colleagues in museums around Australia, to meet the new realities, to chase sponsorship and to adjust to changing public demand.

Creating Relevance

Gower says a museum has to be relevant. How do museums create relevance? The answer is, in a wide variety of ways, to attract different sectors of the public. Spruikers and Culture Keepers both have a number of different ways to attract visitors.



Mr Gorilla at the Museum in Melbourne, 1865. This flamboyant support for Darwin's theory of evolution brought in the crowds.

The Melbourne Museum takes a moderated version of the new approach, to attract a wider section of the market compared to spruiker science centres. One way is to communicate science is through the personal stories of scientists. Scientists are human just like everyone else, so their personalities and personal achievements are things the general community can relate to. Andrea Horvath at the Melbourne Museum has created a range of exhibits on this theme. These display the lives of a wide range of

scientists, including Nobel prize winning medical scientists, with features on modern medical achievements like In Vitro Fertilization and the Bionic Ear. Here attractive static displays are mixed with video presentations of scientists telling their own stories.

Success is More Than Better Visitor Numbers

Are museums more than places of entertainment? They may inspire young people to take up careers in science, but do not run educational courses or give career information advice. Yet they hope to inspire many people about all areas of culture, such as history from science to design, and social theory. Furthermore they are part of life-long learning, and as part of a learning palette beyond the school classroom. All larger museums have schools programs.

How do we measure the success of museums? We might know how many people go through the door, but what was the impact of the exhibition on them? Some museums use exit surveys to measure visitor satisfaction but these are mainly aimed at aiding work to attract people to return. Such surveys are favoured by the museums of the Spruiker type.

We talk about the quality of the impact on visitors, but what do we really mean by this? An exhibit may be of good quality but visitors may be rushed through and only gain a brief exposure to it. If we simply focus on the communication side we may look for a good quality of exposure to an exhibit, as

visitors having adequate time to take in static displays, handling 'hands-on' machines, sitting down for 10 minutes to view a video, or a live presentation. Museums try to put both measures together, to give a good quality exposure to good quality exhibits. Here we are in the realm of complex social interaction with intelligently presented cultural material. Much of the real impact of a museum on visitors is unmeasurable in all but a basic level through questions like, how many people visited the museum? Did they like it? Would they come again?

So a problem for government management of funding a museum is that too much weight tends to be given to basic data, such as numbers through the door, to measure its success. More complex social outcomes are totally over the horizon in the short-term view of most modern management systems. This is a particular issue for the larger and so more expensive-to-run museums, like the Australian Museum of Sydney.

Moreover museums compete with other cultural and entertainment venues for visitors. So they must market themselves in the leisure time sector, and show marketing success by measuring visitor numbers. Again this is more an issue for larger museums, and behoves governments to allow increased funding for marketing in museum budgets.

Research

Generally out of the public eye, but still critical to proper work of a major museum is its research activities. Both the Australian and Melbourne Museums have substantial research portfolios. Research based on collections is important both to bring out the hidden scientific truths of collected items and to aid better communication about these items to the community.

Australian museums focus their research on local subjects, such as the history of aboriginal culture, and local manifestations of global issues, such as biodiversity. They also work in collaboration with universities to bring

together the best expertise on research into particular topics. Central to museum research is the science of systematics, of classifying and naming objects. Why is systematics important? Consider a local environment is under threat. How can we protect the plants, animals, and other organisms in that area if we don't know what they are? Systematics is the basis for understanding the natural world around us.

A Tale of Two Museums

While most Australian museums are managed well, the Australian Museum in Sydney has been mismanaged for many years. It not only needs funds to improve security to prevent thefts, but also \$4-8 million to perform a full inventory of its large collection. Personal politics have led to a stand off with the State Government of New South Wales about improving financial support for the museum. Nevertheless it is to be hoped the State Government of NSW will provide improved funding to help rectify years of neglect, in return for a robust a plan of action.

In contrast to the creaking Australian Museum in New South Wales, Victoria gained a brand new museum building in an innovative ultra-modern style, the Melbourne Museum,



Scientist Dr Janette Norman in the modern DNA Analysis Laboratory at the Melbourne Museum.

opened in 2001. This was the vision of Jeff Kennett in the early 1990's, when Premier of Victoria. His vision included three other innovative and successfully completed culture constructions in Melbourne, namely Federation Square, the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, and renovation of the National Gallery of Victoria. The arts are important "to the condition of people's souls", Kennett stated in 2003⁴.

The Future

Even smaller institutions, like the Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum, are joining the digital revolution, with their own web-sites and joint listings in an online multi-functional database, 'Australian Museums and Galleries On Line' (AMOL)⁵. This database service aims to both increase access to Australia's heritage collections and share information for professionals, volunteers, community users and researchers.

The future? The brochure for the 3rd Science Centre World Congress, held in Canberra early last year, purported that the main issue was that 'science centres (Spruiker museums) are facing immense challenges to maintain relevancy for people and communities in the midst of rapidly changing social and technological contexts'⁶. We may see this statement as Orwellian 'new speak' to mean, 'the more things change the more they stay the same'. Public museums have been around for hundreds of years and should be around for at least

hundreds more. They have, and will continue to, face the issue to continually renew themselves in measured fashion to maintain relevance and attractiveness to gradually changing communities.

It would be useful if governments took their responsibility more seriously to properly maintain these irreplaceable custodians of our culture and heritage, and relied less on crude short-term financial management tools.

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News And Analysis

Plant Biotechnology Wins as States Target S&T Investment

By Duncan ROUCH

What do we really know about plants? How can we better manipulate them to help solve environmental problems and feed the growing populations of our planet? The genes of a plant provide the instructions for building it, from root to leaf and seed. To better understand how plants tick groups of scientists have got together to sequence all the genes of some important plants, such as rice. The entire collection of genes from an organism is called a genome. While a good start has been made on genome sequencing of plants, this work is still behind that of microbes and humans. Nevertheless, work on plants is catching up fast.

Australian scientists are a significant part of the international plant push. The Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics was set up last year, with the main focus being at the University of Adelaide, with satellite centres at the Universities of Melbourne and Queensland. The centres are funded by both federal and state agencies, and mark the growing involvement of state governments in supporting science.

In September the Victorian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics was officially opened by the state Minister for Innovation, John Brumby. This followed a \$4 million grant from the Victorian State Government. Based at the Department of Botany at the University of Melbourne the centre boasts a substantial range of large high-tech equipment to reveal the innermost secrets of proteins from plants, the important products of their genes.

Investment in science and innovative technology is key to the state's future, Brumby espoused in a vibrant speech to the select audience from Victoria's scientific milieu. This investment is expected to materialise in scientific leadership, scholarship, world-class research, and innovative business, with

branding the state. The centre forms part of the ongoing revolution in biotechnology. Central to the growing biotechnology industry, crop plants will be improved so they can use less water and withstand higher levels of salt. The market for such technology crosses the globe, and includes a range of developing and developed regions from Africa to the USA.

Brumby stated that The Victorian Government's Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) initiative had granted \$120m for 32 projects across the state, which included support to the Victorian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics. The STI initiative



John Brumby Victorian Minister for Innovation: eloquent in support for State investment in science and technology.

acted as a catalyst for both knowledge and wealth creation by enhancing Victoria's science and technology base and by facilitating the delivery of beneficial research outcomes. Key to ongoing success of the initiative was the impressive funding leverage, with the State granting 1 dollar on average for every 4 dollars put in by project supporters from other sources.

Linked to development of plant genomics science, continued Brumby, were allied investments by the Government in agricultural and food research centres around the State.

This cohesive mix of strategic and tactical investments is the hallmark of recent investment programs by Queensland, as well as Victoria, in science and technology. The Queensland Smart State Research Facilities Fund has allocated around \$100m of a total \$150m available to projects since its inception in 2001, as part of that State's 'Smart State' strategy.

The Victorian STI program was first off the block, beginning in 1999 with grants of \$48m spread over four years, specifically to support development of the food and agriculture sectors. In the second generation of the STI program, starting this year, funding has been increased to a total of \$310m spread over 5 years. Moreover the focus of the program has been broadened to lever improvement of five strategic economic areas, namely information and communication technology, biotechnology, manufacturing, digital design and environmental technologies. The Queensland Smart State initiative has a similar focus, but notably added with tropical science.

In the air is the creative rivalry between science and technology policy makers in Victoria and Queensland. The loci being the similarly named Department of Innovation... in each state. They are John Brumby's Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development in Victoria and Paul Lucas' Department of Innovation and Information Economy in Queensland. We look forward to other states joining the push.

A key advantage of S&T investment at the State level is the ability to mobilise and improve a range of existing regional resources to meet strategic goals. In this way the state support occurring in science and innovative technology strongly complements the substantial federal investment in this area in synergistic fashion.

River Symposium

Brisbane 31st August to 3rd September 2004
Sheraton Brisbane Hotel, Queensland.

River Symposium is an interactive forum focusing attention on the problems facing the world's rivers, estuaries, catchments and basins, with a particular focus on urban environmental challenges and solutions. The Seventh International River Management Symposium – THREATS TO SUSTAINABLE RIVER SYSTEMS – beating the odds – will be held in Brisbane between 31st August and 3rd September 2004.

Themes for the call of papers include: living with floods, climate change, water trading, agricultural practices towards sustainable rivers and estuaries, industrial pollutants, restoring native fish to rivers and estuaries, damming rivers, environmental flows, challenges of keeping riparian zones healthy, salinity, community involvement in river management, celebrating our waterfronts.

Riverfestival is an initiative of the Brisbane City Council in partnership with Channel Nine and the Queensland Government.

To receive further information please write or e-mail with full contact details and identify your area(s) of interest.

Stephen Nelson
Symposium Manager
Riverfestival Brisbane Pty Ltd
Box 25 Stanley Street Plaza
South Bank QLD 4101

Telephone: 07 3846 7444
Facsimile: 07 3846 7660
Email: stephen.nelson@riverfestival.com.au
Website: www.riverfestival.com.au

Science Poem: by Duncan Rouch

Bohr

Niels Bohr (1885-1962)

First swallows beat by the bountiful Beech this Copenhagen Spring
I soar about the nucleus like the bold vibrant electron
To jump from one orbital to another ejecting pure light
My suit the rainbow broadcast by a hundred different atoms

Thrill of the myriad airy ideas swirling through this young mind
To a nascent notion mathematics crafts ever precise form
Exposed in blinding glory the inner beauty of the atom
The Copenhagen group I lead with brilliant student Heisenberg

I joust with Einstein by paradoxes in the quantum atom
Yet my deepest puzzle is Heisenberg of 1941
Once great friend how did you appear to me as the cold German brute?
The idea of a German atomic bomb explodes in my mind

Yes I brought my thoughts to advance the first allied nuclear weapon
Yet as you I fought to halt the spectre of nuclear holocaust
Traumas of World War II too dark to bring into fresh light
But to stern heavy cumulus obliterates the horizon

I wrestle 1941 yet dare not tell you my anguish
Tiller to tack recall my first son overboard lost to this world
Complementarity of these old wounds evades this troubled soul
Sound of the first swallow delivers some comfort this my last Spring

Perrin's Points



NOTICES TO MEMBERS FROM
THE HON. SECRETARY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2003 -

The Annual General Meeting of ANZAAS was held on Wednesday 26th November and was again very poorly attended.

Back in 1997, the new Council of ANZAAS arranged for satellite meetings to take place in each Division at the relevant time with the Convenor of those meetings being the Divisional Council Member or the Divisional Secretary. The satellite meetings have the same status as the Adelaide meeting and all financial or honorary members are entitled to attend in person and cast a vote at any of the meetings. The *raison d'être* for the satellite meetings was to overcome the "tyranny of distance" and permit all members to actively participate in the future direction of this illustrious Association.

All members are notified in good time and should make an effort to attend in their division.

APPOINTMENT OF PUBLIC OFFICER -

The AGM voted unanimously to appoint **Mr Thomas Hanna** [*Atomic Manipulation Project, Atomic and Molecular Physics Laboratories RSPHysSE, ANU*] to succeed **Brig. D. Tier** as **Public Officer** of ANZAAS.

The meeting also recorded its thanks for the many years of service given to ANZAAS by Brig. Tier and wishes him a happy and long retirement.

DIVISIONAL MEETINGS -

Members are urged to support Divisional meetings of all kinds, and to particularly encourage the younger members to organise and participate in Divisional activities. It is crucial to the long-term survival of ANZAAS as a credible entity that the younger members begin to be brought into the management of the Association.

Divisional meetings can be good recruiting grounds for new members.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS -

The Constitution of the Association requires that the prescribed Offices shall fall vacant after a term of three years. The incumbent officeholders **cannot** offer themselves for re-election as they have held the office for two consecutive terms. The Offices of **Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Secretary and Member-at-large** will fall vacant at the next Annual General Meeting.

Nominations for the vacant posts are now called for by the Secretary to be received by the close of business on 30th June 2004

The incumbents are:

Chairman: Assoc Prof Paul Adam, School of Biological Science, UNSW, SYDNEY NSW

tel: [02] 9385 2076

fax: [02] 9385 1653

Email: p.adam@unsw.edu.au

Deputy Chairman: Dr. Bob Vickery
22/2, Pacific Street,
BRONTE,
NSW 2024

tel: [02] 9369 2705

fax: [02] 9385 1558

Email: vickery@mpx.com.au

Secretary Robert Perrin, ANZAAS
The University of Adelaide
ADELAIDE,

South Australia 5005

tel: [08] 8303 4965 [O]

fax: [08] 8303 4965 [O]

Email: secretary@anzaas.org.au

Member-at-large: Dr. Peter Smith,
55, Lipscombe Avenue,
SANDY BAY,
Tasmania 7005

tel: 03 6225 1067

fax: 03 6225 1067

More details can be obtained from the Central office

Has the office got your current and correct e-mail address for the ANZAAS Discussion list?

Media Report

By Victor BIEN

Science in the Four Corners Program



One 4 Corners program in particular caught my attention in conveying significant scientific content, although as we know, this is a current affairs documentary program which generally concentrates on societal and political matters. Since being asked to write this column I keep my eyes peeled for things and angles to write about. And this one is a must write!

The particular program was aired on 25 August and was titled "The Anti-Fat Pill and the Bushmen". Since realising the nature of this particular program I had a look at the archives:

<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/archive.htm> that sharpened by awareness of what this program was doing in conveying scientific matters. A fair bit of it has been happening! Programs which had significant scientific content since the beginning of this year include: "White Mischief" 31 Mar, "Ocean Views" 7 Jul, "Patently a Problem" 11 Aug, and "Lost in Space" 22 September.

"The Anti-Fat Pill and the Bushmen" program occurred about the same time as the NSW childhood Obesity Summit. After viewing it I thought that if the anti-fat

pill had've been mainline, the Obesity Summit would not have been necessary!

The anti-fat pill will contain the active ingredient from a vicious looking cactus plant called "hoodia" which originates from the Kalahari desert in Africa. It has been found to increase the sensitivity of the primitive part of the brain (hypocampus?) that controls our sense of fullness - that we have had enough to eat. It has now been firmly established that obesity in the west is significantly due to a loss of sensitivity of this part of the brain, resulting in people feeling the need to eat far more than they really need before they feel that they have had enough. Consequently there is widespread obesity. A pill made with this "magic" ingredient will suppress appetite and stop binge eating thus eliminating the prime cause of general obesity.

The reason 4 Corners addressed this topic is because the manufacturer(s) of this pill will make millions or billions!

Some of this will flow to the poor Kalahari bushmen promising to take them from rank poverty to fabulous riches. How will they cope? What crookery will creep in to deny them of their earnings? Also the program warned to watch out for scamsters who are already trading on the gossip and ripping people off with products that don't have any hoodia in them at all!



If undeliverable, please return to:
Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science
The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA 5005

