

Ragbir Singh Bhathal FRSN 1936–30 November 2022

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Seselja, Loui & National Library of Australia. 1999, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-146271021>

Dr Ragbir Bhathal was an Australian astronomer and author who gained his BSc from the University of Singapore and a PhD on magnetism from the University of Queensland. Prior to his arrival in Australia, Dr Bhathal had been a member of the academic staff of the University of Singapore. He was subsequently offered the role of Foundation Director of the Singapore Science Centre, one of the largest science centres in East Asia, and served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Association

of Science and Technology Centers, Washington DC. He was a UNESCO consultant on science policy for the ASEAN group of nations.

He spent most of his career at Western Sydney University, where he became a Distinguished Teaching Fellow in the School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics, and was known for his work on optical search for extra-terrestrial intelligence (OSETI), nanosecond laser pulsed communications, astrophysics, galactic surveys and the history of Australian astronomy. He wrote 15 books on science and history topics, including *Australian Astronomers: Achievements at the Frontiers of Astronomy* (1996), *Profiles: Australian Women Scientists* (1999), *The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence* (2000), *Aboriginal Astronomy* (2010). His last book, with Ralph Sutherland and Harvey Butcher, was *Mount Stromlo: From Bush Observatory to the Nobel Prize* (2013). He wrote several papers published in the *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*.

Dr Bhathal served as President of the Royal Society of NSW 1984–1986, was its Honorary Secretary 1989–1991, and was awarded the RSNSW Medal in 1988. He was elected a Fellow in 2015 and recently served as Honorary Librarian, in which role he was responsible for the first modern valuation of the Society's library since 1936.

He was also an advisor to the then federal Minister for Science, Barry Jones DistFRSN, and a member of the committee set up to establish the National Science & Technology Centre (Questacon) in Canberra. He was also Project Director for renovations to the Sydney Observatory, and Deputy Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (later the Powerhouse Museum)

in Sydney. He designed and built the twin-dome Campbelltown Rotary Observatory at WSU and was Director of the Observatory 2000–2022. He also won several literary awards, including a CJ Dennis Award from the Victorian government and a Nancy Keesing Fellowship from the State Library of NSW.

