

1322nd Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW

Minutes

The 1322nd Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW took place in the Dixon Room, State Library of NSW, on Wednesday, 5 June 2024, commencing at 6:30 pm. There were 51 Members, Fellows and visitors in attendance. The meeting was recorded for those who could not attend in person.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The President, Dr Susan Pond AM FRSN presided at the meeting. She welcomed Members and guests.

2. MINUTES OF THE 1321st ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the 1321st Ordinary General Meeting were reviewed and approved. There were no matters arising.

3. ANNOUNCEMENT OF NAMES OF CANDIDATES FOR FELLOWSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP

The Fellows and Members Assessment Committee meets between Council meetings and makes recommendations to Council for the election of Fellows and Members. These are circulated to Councillors prior to the Council meeting, with sufficient time for Councillors to assess the nominations. If no valid objections are received from Councillors, they are proposed to Members for consideration at the next OGM.

At this meeting, the Council proposed the following candidates for admission to the Society:

FELLOWSHIP

Professor Gerd Schmalz

Laudation – Gerd Schmalz is recognised as an expert in Several Complex Variables and CR geometry.

Dr Julian Leon Huppert

Laudation – Julian Huppert has made substantial contributions to the study of unusual structures of DNA and public policy as both a scientist and politician.

Dr James Crofton Weaver

Laudation – James Weaver is a cardiologist who has made significant contributions to teaching and research on the treatment of heart disease.

Professor Frances Rosamond

Laudation – Frances Rosamond has an international reputation in the field of algorithms and complexity theory.

Mr Warwick Bruce Giblin

Laudation – Warwick Giblin has been a leader in the development of the environmental management profession.

Professor Timothy Kilgour Roberts

Laudation – Tim Roberts has made a substantial contribution as a researcher and educator in the areas of chronic pain, fatigue and autism.

Professor Eric Pui Fung Chow

Laudation – Eric Chow is an internationally recognised epidemiologist in the field of sexually transmitted infections.

MEMBERSHIP

Associate Professor Ingvars Birznieks

Dr Mustafa Steve Kassem

David Ryan Connolly Reynolds

Benjamin Nossiter

The President encouraged members to nominate colleagues for Membership or Fellowship.

4. CONFIRMATION OF FELLOWSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP AND PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATES

The President presented certificates to new Fellows and Members whose nominations were tabled at the previous OGM and were present at this meeting.

FELLOWSHIP

Professor Alan Davison

Professor Michael Blumenstein

Professor Peter Philip Gray

Professor Christopher Alan Armstrong

Professor Chennupati Jagadish

Professor Trevor Colin Brown

Professor David Christopher Currow

Dr Sarah Jones

Professor Victoria Katharine Haskins

Professor Andrew Baker

Professor Lyria Kay Bennett Moses

Professor Robert John King

Professor Stuart James Khan

Professor Clement Tien-Hui Loy

MEMBERSHIP

Professor Philip Michael Hansbro

Felicity Nelson

Dr John James Byrne Timmins

Christopher Michael Finn

Sarah Christina Bartlett

Associate Professor Christopher Stephen Paschal McErlean

Dr Michael Alexander de Percy

Dr Hugh Douglas Goold

Nicholas John Meagher

Dr Vafa Darren Ghazavi

Dr Shakeel Ahmed Ibne Mahmood

Assoc Prof Elizabeth Stockdale

Dr Catherine Ball

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Jennifer (Jeny) Broughton Baume

5. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL

The President outlined changes being made to the Society's annual awards program. Of note is the change to the award of Bicentennial postgraduate scholarships. These will be based on a published peer-reviewed paper, in conjunction with a CV and a supervisor report.

Nominations for the awards open in July and members are encouraged to give consideration to the wide range of prestigious awards that the Society provides and to ensure there is a strong field of candidates nominated.

The 2024 awards will be presented at the Society's annual dinner to be held on Friday 7 March 2025 in the Strangers' Dining Room, Parliament House Macquarie Street, Sydney.

6. OPEN LECTURE
“RNA and me: from the origins of life and nanomedicine to building an RNA ecosystem”

Professor Pall Thordarson FRSN

Director, UNSW RNA Institute
UNSW Sydney

Pall Thordason discussed his quest for broadening our understanding of how life originated and the RNA world theory and then his work within the burgeoning nanomedicine sector, and how these conspired to throw him into the deep end of the rapid development of a RNA ecosystem in Australia.

The RNA world idea, within the "origin of life" field, centres around the observation that the RNA molecule can do both: carry information (e.g., mRNA) and perform catalytic reactions (e.g., the ribosome – the protein synthesis factory in our cells). For the RNA world hypothesis to be true, there must have been some “intermediate” complex assemblies between simple RNA building blocks and fully functional RNA catalytic/self-replicating systems. Having worked on peptide gels for over a decade, he and his team noted that recent studies in biology suggested that peptides and RNA readily form gel-like structures under certain conditions. They have therefore been investigating if gel formation from short RNA and peptide molecules could form gel-like aggregates and ultimately, if these could provide a pre-biotic chemistry-relevant path for a proto-ribosome to chemically evolve from the pre-biotic soup of chemicals.

Indirectly leading on from the above, Pall entered the field of nanomedicine over a decade ago with an initial focus on targeted delivery with nanoparticles. The potential importance of understanding better how peptides could also aid in the delivery of RNA therapeutics was not lost on his team and therefore, some time ago, he started to argue the case for more investment in RNA therapeutic development. Having first approached our state government in 2019, the recent pandemic and the successful deployment of mRNA vaccines then enabled us to rally scientists for universities and medical research organisations from across the state, and work with like-minded groups in other states, to advance the vision of making Australia a powerhouse in the emerging RNA ecosystem.

About the speaker

Pall (Palli) Thordason obtained his BSc from the University of Iceland in 1996 and a PhD in Organic Chemistry from The University of Sydney in 2001. Following a Marie Curie Fellowship in the Netherlands, he returned to Australia in 2003 and was then appointed at UNSW Sydney in 2007 as a Senior Lecturer where he became a full Professor in 2017. He is the Director of the UNSW RNA Institute and the President of the Royal Australian Chemical Institute (RACI). He is also a program leader for the NSW RNA Production and Research Network and leads the NSW RNA Bioscience Alliance on behalf of the NSW Vice-Chancellor's Committee. Palli has published over 140 referred papers, including in prestigious journals such as Nature and Nature Nanotechnology. His research interest ranges from Nanomedicine, RNA, and peptides to Supramolecular and Systems Chemistry. He is focused on advancing our understanding of how molecules interact with one other and 'self-assemble', and how self-assembly can then be harnessed to create novel functional materials and systems. He has received several awards including the 2012 Le Fèvre Memorial Prize from the Australian Academy of Science for outstanding basic research in Chemistry by a Scientist under the age of 40.

7. VOTE OF THANKS

The vote of thanks was given by the President.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

9. CLOSE

The President closed the meeting at 7:50 pm.

The minutes were recorded by the Secretary, Dr Donald Hector AM FRSN.

Signed as a true record
Dr Susan Pond AM FRSN
President