

1333rd Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW

Minutes

The 1333rd Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW took place at 6:00 pm on Wednesday 6 August 2025 in the **Michael Crouch Room, Mitchell Building, State Library of NSW**, followed by an open lecture. There were approximately 41 Members, Fellows and guests present at the meeting.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Vice President, Em Prof Lindsay Botten FRSN, presided at the meeting. He welcomed members and guests.

Apologies: Professor Christina Slade FRSN

2. MINUTES OF THE 1332nd ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the 1332nd 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 to consider nominations and make recommendations to Council for the election of Fellows and Members. These recommendations are circulated to Councillors in advance of the Council meeting, allowing sufficient time for review. If no valid objections are received, the nominations are then proposed to the Membership for consideration at the next Ordinary General Meeting (OGM).

At this meeting, Council proposed the following candidates for admission to the Society; however, the nomination was not finalised in time for inclusion in the 1331st OGM:

MEMBERSHIP

- Associate Professor Christine Meng Ji
- Dr Justin Ellis
- Associate Professor Anai Gonzalez-Cordera

4. PRESENTATION OF FELLOWSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATES

The Vice President presented the certificate to the following new Member who was present at the meeting:

MEMBERSHIP

- Ms Debbie Perik

5. REPORT FROM COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL

The Vice President provided an overview of the work of the Council on financial sustainability of the Society, a broad and engaging activities program, communications and outreach, membership (engagement and uptake) and operations.

Nominations for The Royal Society of NSW Awards for 2025 opened on 1 July and close on 30 September.

6. OPEN LECTURE

“PFAS in New South Wales: Is it under control?”

Associate Professor Ian Wright

Discipline of Environmental Science, School of Science, Western Sydney University

In 2024, NSW became aware that some of its residents were drinking water containing harmful chemicals — per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). This was triggered by news that the United States health authorities announced new laws reducing the safe levels of PFAS in drinking water supplies. A Sydney Morning Herald newspaper article in June 2024, *There's no safe level: Carcinogens found in tap water across Australia*, reported that PFAS 'forever chemicals' had been detected in drinking water supplies around Australia. The NSW Chief Health Officer declared on 11 June 2024 that Sydney's drinking water was safe.

It came as a major shock when it was announced in August 2024 that the Blue Mountains water supply contained elevated levels of PFAS. In September 2024, Ian Wright assisted Fairfax journalists in tracking down the source of this contamination. Sampling water from a flowing creek in a 'protected' Blue Mountains drinking water catchment, they discovered PFAS at a concentration that exceeded the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines by more than 50 times. It later emerged that the contamination was probably from fire-fighting foam used to control the fire from a burning petrol tanker, which crashed in 1992 on the Great Western Highway near Medlow Bath.

PFAS is not just an issue for Blue Mountains drinking water. An additional concern is the impact of elevated PFAS on water supplies in rural and regional communities. Even grazing livestock are known to be susceptible to PFAS contamination of their meat if their drinking water exceeds trace concentrations. PhD student research supervised by Ian Wright has revealed that platypuses have substantial PFOS bioaccumulation.

Should people be concerned about their exposure to PFAS? What action should they take? Should they have their blood tested? Can we trust that contamination by PFAS is under control? Ian Wright's presentation will canvass these questions surrounding an issue that is important to us all.

About the speaker

Ian Wright is a water scientist and an Associate Professor at the Western Sydney University (WSU) School of Science. He teaches classes in water science and management, environmental planning, and environmental regulation across several degree programs. Before joining WSU, he worked as a scientist in the urban water industry, mainly at Sydney Water. His water science interests include freshwater ecology, water chemistry, and water pollution (both science and management). His research interests include urban water issues, contamination from concrete materials, and the impact of mining on streams and rivers. He has provided independent expert testimony for environmental science matters for the NSW Land & Environment Court and also for mining development proposals being considered through the planning system.

7. VOTE OF THANKS

A vote of thanks was given by Em Prof Lindsay Botten FRSN.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

9. CLOSE

The Vice President closed the meeting at 7:30 pm.

The minutes were recorded by the Secretary, Em. Prof Trevor Brown FRSN.

Signed as a true record
Em Prof Lindsay Botten FRSN
Vice President