

1339th Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW

Minutes

The 1339th Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW took place at 6:00 pm on Wednesday 8 April 2026 in the Michael Crouch Room, Level 1, Mitchell Building, State Library of NSW, Shakespeare Place, Sydney, followed by an open lecture.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The President, Em Prof Christina Slade FRSN, welcomed members and guests to the meeting. She noted that the acknowledgment of Country had already been made at the preceding Annual General Meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE 1338th ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The President noted that it is not the Society's current practice to approve minutes from the floor, as they are circulated and any objections are sought electronically. The minutes of the 1338th Ordinary General Meeting were available to members, and no further matters were raised from the floor.

3. CONFIRMATION OF NAMES OF CANDIDATES FOR FELLOWSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP

The President confirmed the following candidates for Fellowship and Membership, as recommended by Council at its meeting on 18 February 2026 on the advice of the Fellows and Members Assessment Committee:

FELLOWSHIP

Professor Cheryl Anne Jones

Laudation – Cheryl Jones has made an outstanding international contribution to childhood infectious disease and health workforce education.

Professor Anthony John Burke

Laudation – Anthony Burke has made significant contributions to the field of urban architecture, and in engaging with the general public about design and architecture.

Professor Jill Bennett

Laudation – Jill Bennett has made a significant contribution to the arts, media and visual communication.

Judge Sharon Alexandra Burchell

Laudation – Sharon Burchell is a judicial officer with substantial expertise in commercial and administrative law, and community service.

Professor Timothy David Stephens

Laudation – Timothy Stephens has made a substantial contribution to international law, notably in the fields of ocean governance and polar law.

Professor Marian Pam Baird

Laudation – Marian Baird has made a significant contribution to women's welfare through her work on employment, gender equality, and domestic and family violence.

Professor Bradley J. Moggridge

Laudation – Bradley Moggridge has made a significant contribution to water science, especially in the exploration of the common ground between Indigenous and global knowledge systems.

Professor Dennis Del Favero

Laudation – Dennis Del Favero has made a substantial contribution to digital innovation in the creative arts, including media and communication.

Professor Carel Martijn de Sterke

Laudation – Martijn de Sterke has made a significant contribution to nonlinear optics and photonics.

MEMBERSHIP

Yvonne I-Chen Hsu

Jane Cotter

Professor Lina Yao

Daniel Paul Hart

Paul Jeffery

Noel William Alexander Lambert

Dr Quentin Meyer

Alexander Romney Dowthwaite

Arlene May Tansey

Dr Hannah Schunker

Renee Rimington O’Kane

4. PRESENTATION OF FELLOWSHIP, MEMBERSHIP AND APPRECIATION CERTIFICATES

No Fellowship or Membership certificates were presented. The President presented certificates of appreciation to Fauzia Purba and Zile Yu in recognition of their assistance, particularly in organising the Annual Dinner.

5. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL

The President reported that there had been substantial activity underway in the Society. She noted that the last Council meeting had marked the departure of Dr Susan Pond AM FRSN and other retiring office bearers and councillors.

She reflected on the Society’s recent use of working groups arising from the strategic plan, observing that while some had completed useful work, the structure had become somewhat loose. She advised that Council was therefore moving back towards a more formal committee structure, with a stronger focus on balanced programming and clear responsibilities. She noted in particular the intention to establish a properly constituted events committee.

The President reported that the 2026 events program had been developed and that the year had begun strongly. She referred to the lecture by Dr Abul Rizvi on Australia’s population, the Ideas@theHouse event featuring Susan Coyle on the current defence situation, the successful Annual Dinner, the Early Career Researchers and Students Awards hosted by the University of Sydney, and preparations for the Annual Forum. She expressed gratitude for the support provided by Em Prof Lindsay Botten FRSN and Em Prof Trevor Brown FRSN.

6. OPEN LECTURE

“A Drone by any other name”

Dr Catherine Ball

Scientific Futurist, Tech Influencer, Robotics Expert, Adjunct Professor
and

Simon Masters

Deputy Director, Future Flight, InnovateUK

For a decade, Australia was the global drone rule-maker, and the UK was still warming up.

This presentation tells the story of a regulatory power shift. Australia got out fast, with CASA’s 2016 reforms making commercial drone operations easier and more accessible well before many markets caught up. It was bold, practical, and business-friendly. In many ways, Australia wrote the early playbook for modern drone regulation.

But being first is not the same as staying first.

The UK arrived later, then surged ahead by pairing regulation with serious national investment and a coordinated cross-government approach. It moved into a more advanced risk-based framework, aligned drone policy with broader aviation reform, and backed it with a Future of Flight strategy designed to scale real-world operations, including beyond visual line of sight. In short, the UK did not just regulate drones; it funded the future they needed.

This session compares the two countries side by side, showing how Australia led on early regulatory innovation, while the UK built the stronger long game through capital, policy alignment, and industry mobilisation.

If Australia proved drones could be regulated, the UK is proving they can be scaled.

And that difference is now shaping who leads the next decade.

About the speakers

Dr Catherine Ball is an award-winning company director, bestselling author, futurist and adjunct professor working across global projects where emerging technologies meet humanitarian, education and environmental needs.

Working to protect the natural environment and empowering all members of society through mutual education and respect are core aspects of her chosen projects. As well as supporting start-ups and leaders from all generations across the globe, Catherine is particularly passionate about social mobility and equity.

Catherine is proud to be an advisor to a broad range of enterprises and philanthropic organisations, including being an XPRIZE visioneer and member of their Global Brains Trust.

Simon Masters has 20 years of experience across industry and public sector roles. With a background in aerospace and technology, he has held senior positions in the civil and military aerospace sectors, including systems engineering and R&D roles with Airbus and BAE SYSTEMS.

He took up the role of Deputy Director for the Future Flight Challenge within InnovateUK in 2020, focusing on developing drone and advanced air mobility capabilities and supporting systems in the UK. He has led efforts to integrate technology solutions with emerging use cases, particularly those addressing needs and opportunities in public services. In 2024, he took on the leadership of the Future Flight Challenge program as it transitions from R&D to commercialisation and growth. Passionate about innovation and collaboration, he has worked to build international partnerships across Europe, Japan and Australia.

7. VOTE OF THANKS

A vote of thanks was given by Em Prof Christina Slade FRSN.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

9. CLOSE

The 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 Christina Slade FRSN
President