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ROYAL
SOCIETY
NEW SOUTH WALES

The Bulletin 499

November 2025

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A message from the President

Dear <<First Name>> <<Last Name>>

The Sydney program offered two outstanding events in October. On 1 October, following the 1335th Ordinary General Meeting, Professor Merlin Crossley from UNSW Sydney was in discussion with The Honourable Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, at a sold-out meeting on the topic of [‘Have Universities become too political?’](#) Bill Shorten brought his grasp of the highest levels of political life to the table, and Merlin Crossley his distinguished academic career and experience at the highest levels of university management. The topic is a highly sensitive one – it is a time of political turmoil in the higher education sector, not only in Australia, but also in the US, the UK, New Zealand, and Canada. We can no longer pretend that the ivory tower of a university is surrounded by impenetrable moats. The political and the academic are deeply intertwined. Bill Shorten made some telling points – Why, he wondered, when so many voters have been to university, are they not vociferously defending the institutions? Why do Australian universities compete with each other, rather than work together as a lobby group? Why do they all offer the same generalist mix? Merlin Crossley responded that there is, in fact, a high level of collaboration across institutions. Universities are underfunded and are forced to seek new markets. Above all, he argued for the importance of funding for research. The [recording of this conversation](#) is now available on our YouTube channel, should you have been unable to attend.



On 19 October, Professor Anthony Burke, Professor of Architecture at the University of Technology Sydney, and the presenter of *Grand Designs Australia* and *Restoration Australia*,

spoke in the *Provocations and Inspirations* series at the Union University and Schools Club. His topic, '[After the Crisis: the New Australian Dream](#)', was very timely. The mismatch between supply and demand of housing, rising house prices and intergenerational inequity are familiar issues. Anthony Burke brought a paradigm change to the debate – it is not, he argued, a problem of supply and demand. We *have* housing in Australia – it is the distribution and the culture and the understanding of the home that needs to change. He brings an unparalleled background to the debate. Born and bred in Sydney's Northern Beaches, he studied architecture at UNSW, followed by a Master's at Columbia University and a stint at the University of California, Berkeley. He returned to Australia to UTS, where he is a Professor. He has worked at the Beijing Institute of Technology and the Bandung Institute of Technology. He was co-creative director of the Venice Architectural Biennale in 2012. He hosted *Restoration Australia* and took over as host of *Grand Designs Australia* from 2024. His new six-part series, *The Home Front*, on ABC Radio National, brings these issues into focus.

The Australian stereotype of the quarter-acre block protecting a nuclear family is no longer the sole model we should promote. Policy needs to move beyond that post-war model to consider new forms of family, the increasing number of people living alone, or in new combinations. They live lives that are quite different from those of the twentieth century. We are all familiar, from *Grand Designs*, with the tension and emotional toll house building makes. Anthony spoke of the strong emotions tied up with the home and urged us to untangle the complex relationships between personal and national identities and our ways of life. The Australian way of life is no longer the standard quarter-acre block, and the sense of community on which we once relied is being undermined. People are lonely. Can we consider inter-generational housing, as many of our Asian neighbours do? Does each family need its own pool and media room? He urged us to deconstruct our understanding of housing, to think differently. A recording of his presentation will be available shortly on our YouTube channel.

On 29 October, I will be joining the New England and North West Branch for Dr Kyle Mulroony talking on '[Building resilient futures: Understanding rural youth through the lens of place, risk and prevention](#)'. On 30 October, the Hunter Branch is hosting the '[Male Infertility Public Forum](#)' with the Hunter Medical Research Institute. On 5 November, the Western NSW Branch, together with Charles Sturt University, will present Professor Jane Quinn speaking on '[Optimising yield, growth, and use of the '5th quarter' for Australian agricultural food access and market security](#).' And of course, we look forward to the Forum at Government House on '[AI: The Hope and The Hype](#)' on 6 November from Government House.

By the time that you read this Bulletin, you will have received your membership renewal notice from our secretariat. Your membership fee provides the vital support needed for the Society to undertake its work. For this we are very grateful and I look forward to your continued support and strong engagement with the Society into 2026.

Christina Slade FRSN

[President](#)

[Royal Society of New South Wales](#)

For your diary

The Society's annual events program is published in the online [Events Calendar](#), which is updated regularly.

- [New England North West Branch Meeting 2025-1](#) (Wednesday, 29 October 2025, 5.00–7.30 pm AEDT, NOVA, 122 Faulkner Street, Armidale NSW 2350) *Building resilient futures: Empowering rural youth and preventing crime*, Dr Kyle Mulrooney, School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, University of New England
- [Hunter Branch Meeting 2025-4](#) (Thursday, 30 October 2025, 5.30 pm for 6.00–8.00 pm AEDT, NEX, Newcastle Exhibition and Convention Centre, 309 King Street, Newcastle West, NSW 2302) *Male Infertility Public Forum*, featuring Dr John Schjenken (1, 2), Dr Elizabeth Torres-Arce (1,2), Dr Nathan Burke (1), Dr Aleona Swegen (1, 2), Professor John Aitken (1, 2), Dr Andrew Hedges (3), Nick Allen-Ducat (4) — (1) University of Newcastle, (2) Hunter Medical Research Institute, (3) IVF Australia, (4) Hit 106.9 Newcastle
- [Western NSW Branch Meeting 2025-4](#) (Wednesday, 5 November 2025, 7.40–8.40 pm AEDT, CSU Riverina Playhouse, Wagga Wagga and live streaming) *Optimising yield, growth, and use of the '5th quarter' for Australian agricultural food access and market security*, Professor Jane Quinn FRSN, Gulbali Institute, Charles Sturt University
- [RSNSW and Learned Academies Forum 2025](#) (Thursday, 6 November 2025, 9.00 am – 5.00 pm AEDT, Government House Sydney and live streaming, *AI: The Hope and The Hype*
- [ANU Solar Oration 2025](#) (Thursday, 6 November 2025, 6.00 – 7.30 pm AEDT), *The next grid: building resilience in a renewable world*, Merryn York, Australian Energy Market Operator (presented by the Australian National University Centre for Energy Systems)
- [1336th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#) (Wednesday, 12 November 2025, 6.00–7.30 pm AEDT, Zoom webinar) *Arts-based Community Interventions for Youth Mental Health*, Professor Katherine Boydell FASSA, Professor of Mental Health and Director, Arts-based Knowledge Translation Lab, Black Dog Institute
- [Southern Highlands Branch Meeting 2025-10](#) (Thursday, 20 November 2025, 6.30–7.30 pm AEDT, RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room) *Laughing at other people's pain: Why we do it and is it ethical*, Dr Jessica Milner Davis FRSN, Honorary Research Associate, University of Sydney
- [1337th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#) (Wednesday, 3 December 2025, 6.00–7.30 pm AEDT, Michael Crouch Room, Mitchell Building, State Library of NSW) *Topic and speaker update underway*
- [Hunter Branch Meeting 2025-5](#) (Thursday, 4 December 2025, 5.30 pm for 6.00 – 7.00 pm AEDT, NEX, Newcastle Exhibition and Convention Centre, 309 King Street, Newcastle West, NSW 2302) *Renewable energy 101: What is being delivered in NSW's first renewable energy zone?*, Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin FRSN FEIANZ, Principal, ESE Justice

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News

Society Fellow, Arthur Sinodinos, awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Business by the University of Sydney

On 7 October 2025, the University of Sydney awarded an Honorary Doctor of Business (honoris causa) to The Hon. Arthur Sinodinos AO, recognising his decades of public service, leadership,

and contributions to politics, policy, and diplomacy. The ceremony, held in the Great Hall, was led by Chancellor David Thodey AO and Vice-Chancellor Professor Mark Scott AO, who praised Sinodinos for his principled advocacy of liberal democracy and reform.



Arthur Sinodinos began his career with a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) from the University of Newcastle and entered the Department of Finance as a graduate. He rose to prominence as Senior Adviser and Chief of Staff to Prime Minister John Howard, helping implement major reforms like the GST and Telstra's privatisation. His strategic policy coordination led to senior roles in finance and banking, before he returned to politics as a Senator for NSW in 2011–2019.

As Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, he oversaw the creation of the Australian Space Agency. Later, as Ambassador to the United States (2020–2023), he navigated key diplomatic challenges, including AUKUS negotiations and pandemic-era transitions. He continues to serve through philanthropic work and chairs the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. Professor Scott commended his lifelong dedication to reform and Australia's global engagement.

The Council of the Society warmly congratulates Dr Sinodinos on his latest honour in recognition of his career achievements.

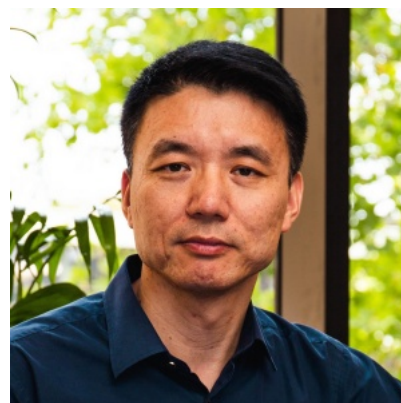
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Society Fellows, Chuan Zhao & Pall Thordason, receive RACI Awards

Professor Chuan Zhao FRSN, of the UNSW School of Chemistry, has been awarded the Applied Research and Innovation Award of the Royal Australian Chemical Institute.

Professor Zhao, who became an [Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow](#) in June, was recognised for significant contributions to developing new electrochemical materials and methods for clean, sustainable energy.

His work has transformed the hydrogen industry. His patented 3D-electrode technology is widely regarded as the benchmark by laboratories worldwide and has been adopted broadly by the hydrogen industry for reducing the cost of green hydrogen. Through a suite of patented technologies and spinout companies, his electrochemistry research breakthroughs have been translated into sustainable materials to improve the efficiency of water electrolyzers for hydrogen production.



Professor Zhao said one of the biggest challenges to the widespread use of green hydrogen is the cost. 'Developing catalysts made from common elements such as nickel and iron that can replace those based on expensive precious metals like platinum and iridium is key to addressing this grand challenge. And by innovating clean energy technologies and enabling scalable, affordable hydrogen production, we're contributing to global decarbonisation and supporting Australia's transition to a net-zero economy,' Prof. Zhao said.

Professor Pall Thordarson FRSN, also of the UNSW School of Chemistry, has been awarded the Leighton Memorial Medal of the Royal Australian Chemical Institute. The award recognises outstanding contributions to research, technology, leadership, and the advancement of the chemical sciences.

Pall Thordarson started his academic career as an organic chemist, studying and creating carbon-based molecules – the building blocks of life and many modern materials.

'I've always been interested in the interface between chemistry and biology,' he said. 'Life itself is the ultimate complex chemical system.'

Known in science and medical circles for his breakthroughs using supramolecular chemistry and nanotechnology that mimic biological systems, Prof. Thordarson's work has resulted in life-changing products. These include smart gels and biodevices, some of which help anti-cancer drugs kill tumorous cells, reducing the side effects of chemotherapy, and others that have led to the creation of better biosensors for medical applications.

As Director of Australia's first and leading RNA research hub, the UNSW RNA Institute, Professor Thordarson oversees pioneering research in biology, chemistry and medicine. His teams are working to advance RNA technologies and therapeutics for products such as vaccines and treatments for diseases.

The Council of the Royal Society of NSW extends its warm congratulations to Professors Zhao and Thordarson on this further recognition of their outstanding research achievements.

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Events

New England North West Branch Meeting: 2025-1 – 29 October 2025

Building resilient futures: Understanding rural youth through the lens of place, risk, and prevention

Dr Kyle Mulrooney

Co-Director, Centre for Rural Criminology
University of New England

Panellists

Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council

Samantha Guilbert, Youth on Track

PCYC Armidale representative

Date: Wednesday, 29 October 2025, 5.00–7.30 pm AEDT

Venue: NOVA, 122 Faulkner Street, Armidale NSW 2350

Entry: No charge

Registration: [Please register](#) before 2.00 pm AEDT on Tuesday, 28 October 2025

All are welcome



REGISTER NOW

ENQUIRIES

before 2.00 pm AEDT on Tues. 28 Oct.

by email to the Branch Secretary

Summary: Youth crime prevention is often framed through universal policies and urban experiences. Yet, for young people growing up in rural and regional Australia, the dynamics of opportunity, belonging, and marginalisation are uniquely shaped by place. This presentation explores how rural environments influence both the risks of offending and the possibilities for prevention, drawing on emerging research in rural criminology and community resilience.

In rural settings, young people often navigate complex social geographies such as tight-knit communities with deep social capital, yet also constrained access to services, education, and employment. The same rural features that foster collective efficacy can also amplify disadvantage when social exclusion, poverty, or substance use take hold. Through this lens, prevention becomes not only about deterring crime but about strengthening the social and spatial conditions that enable youth to thrive.

Using examples from research on rural drug use, policing, and community safety, this presentation highlights how locally grounded, place-sensitive strategies can build resilience among rural youth. It argues for a shift from deficit-based approaches that pathologise rural young people to models of prevention that recognise rural assets, including connection, creativity, and community cohesion, as key to reducing harm and building safer, more inclusive futures.

Kyle Mulrooney holds a Ph.D. in Cultural and Global Criminology from the University of Kent and Universität Hamburg, an MA in the Sociology of Law from the International Institute for the Sociology of Law and a BA (Honours) in Criminology and Justice from Ontario Tech University. Kyle has a particular interest in questions of how we as a society determine what is considered criminal, how we then respond to crime, and why we elect particular solutions to do so. Kyle's current research centres on rural criminology and explores how aspects of cultural geography and locational context impact upon the types, incidences and responses to crime and access to related services. He has published on issues ranging from crime prevention and policing to drug consumption and criminal justice. Kyle serves as the Co-Director of the Centre for Rural Criminology (UNE) and as the Vice President (elect) of the International Society for the Study of Rural Crime. He is a recognised international expert in rural criminology, with his research and work being utilised by policy-makers and industry in practice and called upon often in the media

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Hunter Branch Meeting: 2025-4 — 30 October 2025

Male Infertility Public Forum

Dr John Schjenken (1, 2), Dr Elizabeth Torres-Arce (1,2),

Dr Nathan Burke (1), Dr Aleona Swegen (1, 2),

Professor John Aitken (1, 2), Dr Andrew Hedges (3),

Nick Allen-Ducat (4)

(1) University of Newcastle

(2) Hunter Medical Research Institute

- (3) IVF Australia
- (4) Hit 106.9 Newcastle

Date: Thursday, 30 October 2025, 6.00–8.00 pm AEDT
Venue: NEX, Newcastle Exhibition and Convention Centre, 309 King Street, Newcastle West, NSW
Entry: No charge
Registration: [Registration](#) is required by 2.00 pm AEDT on Wednesday, 29 October 2025
Enquiries: [by email](#) to the Hunter Branch Chair
All are welcome

This event is presented jointly by the Hunter Medical Research Institute and the Royal Society of New South Wales.



REGISTER NOW

before 2.00 pm AEDT on Tues. 28 Oct.

ENQUIRIES

by email to the Branch Chair

During registration, you may enter a question for the forum panel members to discuss.

Summary

We all know it takes one egg and one sperm to make a baby, so why has infertility so often been seen as only a women’s issue?

Infertility affects 1 in 6 couples worldwide, and in fact, male factors are responsible in about 50% of cases.

As science advances, we’re learning just how crucial the male role is, not only for conception, but also for the health of our future generations.

Join us for an event that shines a spotlight on male reproductive health.

Hear from local young researchers sharing the latest findings, and take part in a panel discussion with experts in reproductive science, IVF, men’s health, and a local personality who has recently faced infertility challenges.

Let’s break the silence and broaden the conversation about infertility—because it’s not just a women’s issue.

Presenters

Dr John Schjenken

John Schjenken is a senior lecturer and director of the [Hunter Medical Research Institute Infertility and Reproduction Research Program](#) who teaches in the discipline of biological sciences program. His research looks at how men contribute to fertility, especially by studying the makeup of semen and the important signals it carries. Understanding these signals can help us better understand how conception happens and how to support healthy pregnancies.



Dr Elizabeth Torres-Arce

Elizabeth Torres Arce is a third-year PhD student studying the intersection of male and female fertility. She has worked in the field of reproduction for the past 8 years as a clinician, a laboratory andrologist at an IVF clinic, and as a researcher.



Dr Nathan Burke

Nathan Burke is a postdoctoral research fellow investigating the relationship between male infertility and whole-body health. Nathan completed his undergraduate and PhD studies at the University of Newcastle and continues this work at the University of Melbourne, working with a combination of human clinical samples and animal models.



Dr Aleona Swegen

Aleona Swegen is an ARC DECRA Fellow within HMRI's Infertility and Reproduction Research Program. A veterinarian by training, she completed her PhD in reproductive biology in 2017 and has since established herself as a leading researcher in reproductive biotechnology. Her translational research addresses critical challenges in both animal and human fertility, with a vision to apply cutting-edge reproductive solutions to transform livestock industries, human IVF practice and wildlife conservation. Dr Swegen is co-founder and CEO of Newcastle Fertility Solutions, a startup dedicated to commercialising new reproductive biotechnologies emerging from her team's research.



Distinguished Emeritus Laureate Professor John Aitken

John Aitken's research career began with a PhD in reproductive biology from the University of Cambridge. Following postdoctoral positions in Edinburgh, Bordeaux and the World Health Organisation in Geneva, he was appointed to the MRC Reproductive Biology Unit, University of Edinburgh, to establish a research group in andrology. In 1998, he moved to the University of Newcastle, NSW, as Chair of Biological Sciences and, subsequently, Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Biotechnology & Development and Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Health and Medicine. He is currently Distinguished Emeritus Laureate Professor of Biological Sciences and Scientific Advisor to a biotechnology company, Memphasys.



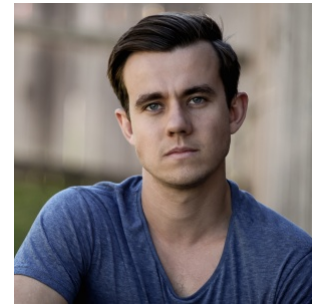
Dr Andrew Hedges

Andrew Hedges is the Clinical Director of Hunter IVF with over 20 years' experience in infertility. He studied medicine at the University of Newcastle and completed a Master's in Reproductive Medicine in Sydney. His expertise includes IVF, endometriosis, hormonal disorders, and pelvic surgery. He also fosters collaborative research in sperm quality, with the HMRI Infertility and Reproduction Research Program based at the University of Newcastle.



Nick Allen-Ducat

Nick Allen-Ducat, known affectionately as “Ducko,” is a dynamic radio host on Newcastle’s Hit 106.9 Breakfast. With a strong background in media, Nick also appears on television—presenting the weather on Weekend Today and hosting a national kids’ sports show. A versatile voice talent, Nick has lent his voice to major brands including Oz Lotto. His trademark energy, warmth, and authenticity have made him a favourite among listeners, who connect with his down-to-earth style and quick wit. Beyond entertainment, Nick’s openness about male fertility has sparked a national conversation, breaking stigma and fostering real connections with audiences across Australia.



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Western NSW Branch Meeting 2025-4 — 5 November 2025

Optimising yield, growth, and use of the ‘5th quarter’ for Australian agricultural food access and market security

Professor Jane Quinn FRSN

Professor in Veterinary Parasitology
Gulbali Institute
Charles Sturt University



Date: Wednesday, 5 November 2025, 7.40 – 8.40 pm AEDT

Venue: CSU Riverina Playhouse, Wagga Wagga and live streaming

Registration: [Registration through Humanitix](#) is required

Entry: No charge

All are welcome

[REGISTER NOW](#)

Please register through Humanitix

This meeting is a joint presentation of Charles Sturt University and the Western NSW Branch of the Royal Society of NSW.

Summary: Agricultural innovation and ‘ag tech’ are now words in common parlance in government, industry and academia. Whilst frequently spoken, how are advances in technologies, including machine learning and AI, feed additives for livestock, and other recent or rediscovered innovations, helping to drive increased profitability, market access, consumer confidence and food security for Australian industries?

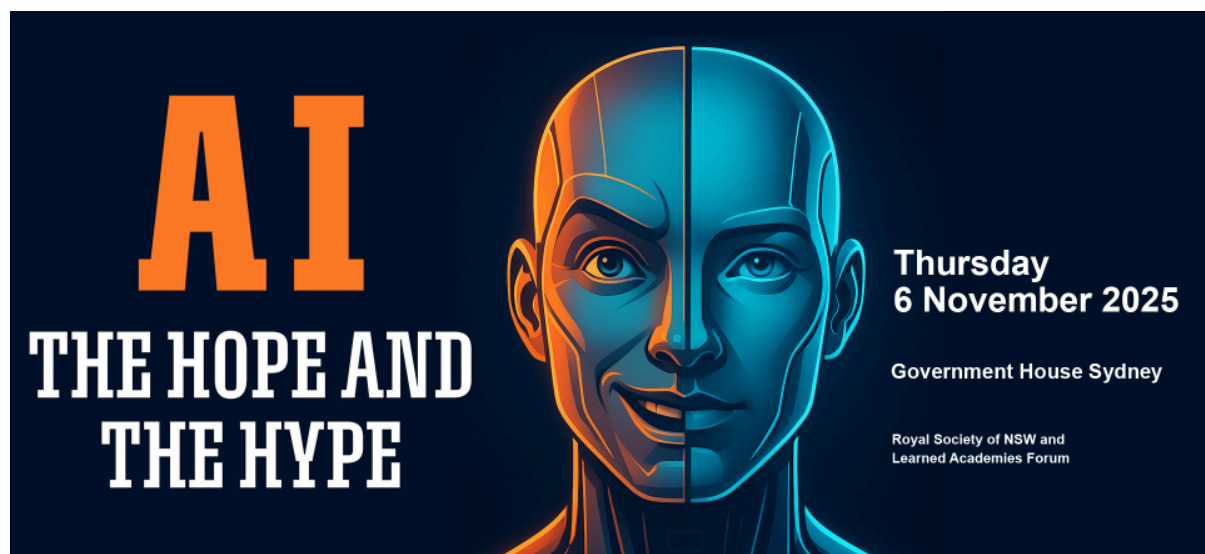
In this talk, Professor Quinn will investigate current assumptions about agricultural innovation, review work undertaken on valorisation and quality assurance of the ‘5th quarter’, interrogate how data is driving decisions and agricultural goals for success, and consider how innovation across the broader agricultural sector is helping secure our food future for the 21st century and

beyond. This talk will cover work undertaken at Charles Sturt University and its collaborative partnerships, as well as considering the broader context of the agricultural sector as a key pillar of the Australian economy.

With more than three and a half decades in academic research, the career of **Jane Quinn** has spanned toxins to trade access, genetics to Average Daily Gain, and impacts of disease, management and performance in multiple species and systems, including rodents, chickens, kangaroos, horses, sheep and cattle. Jane's work has focused on improving animal and human outcomes, whether that be through improved farming practices, the use of animals to understand human health conditions or optimising health and welfare for livestock production. She has investigated pasture species with toxic profiles and their impacts on livestock health and performance, the use of feed additives in multiple species using in-vitro and in-vivo approaches, the optimisation of health and performance in intensive beef systems as well as the impacts of production systems on meat quality outcomes and consumer acceptance. With a portfolio of work that spans the academic-industry continuum, her current work investigates the scaling and use of the systemic byproducts of animal production to increase yield and economic value, drive quality assurance processes, minimise disease through early intervention, and meet industry and consumer demands for high-quality, ethically produced agricultural products in Australia and worldwide.

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RSNSW and Learned Academies Forum 2025 — 6 November 2025



AI: THE HOPE AND THE HYPE

Date: Thursday, 14 November 2024, live streaming from 9.00 am–5.00 pm AEDT

Venue: Government House, Sydney: in person and [live streaming](#)

Program: [Brochure \(5 MB.pdf\)](#).

Entry: No charge

[READ MORE](#)[REGISTER NOW](#)

for the livestream through Humanitix

Summary

Artificial intelligence today sits at the crossroads of grand hopes and rampant hype. Optimists point to extraordinary investments—tech giants like Microsoft, Amazon, Meta, and Alphabet pumping hundreds of billions of dollars into AI infrastructure—as catalysts for growth and efficiency. In the U.S., AI-driven capital expenditures in the second quarter of this year accounted for nearly half of that quarter’s 3% GDP gain. McKinsey forecasts an astonishing \$7 trillion in global AI investment over the next five years, fuelling narratives of transformative potential.

This wave of optimism has also reached Australia. Political leaders—including Treasurer Jim Chalmers—note “we see AI as a huge opportunity for Australia, it’s a key part of our productivity agenda, an absolute game changer”, aligning with Productivity Commission projections of AU\$116 billion in gains over the next decade and a 4.3 percentage-point boost in labour productivity. This marks a significant shift from the earlier priority on safe, ethical deployment to one of economic opportunity.

This shift extends beyond Australia. In the United Kingdom, the new Labour government’s AI Opportunities Action Plan—backed by £14 billion in private-sector investment—marks a clear pivot from previous safety-centred messaging to one emphasising “opportunity and growth.” However, history offers a cautionary note—productivity gains are rarely distributed evenly. A recent Nature paper, *Bridging the Digital Divide*, examined data from 59 countries over 25 years and found that while technological innovation can enhance connectivity and efficiency, it has often exacerbated income inequality, especially in developed economies.

And then there is the question of whether these forecast productivity gains are realistic. Many economists urge caution. Torsten Sløk, Apollo’s chief economist, warns the AI bubble may rival the 1990s dot-com boom, while Nobel laureate Daron Acemoglu estimates AI may automate only 5% of jobs and contribute approximately 1% to global GDP this decade, a non-trivial but modest effect, and certainly much less than the revolutionary changes some are predicting. Emily M. Bender’s *The AI Con* also challenges techno-optimism by characterising many AI systems as “sophisticated illusions” that mimic understanding without genuine comprehension, underpinned by invisible labour and structural inequality.

A more balanced view is given by Narayanan and Kapoor, in *AI as Normal Technology*, urging us to understand AI as akin to electricity or the internet—transformative but gradual, institutionally mediated—not as a sudden rupture, tempering both utopian and apocalyptic visions.

This evolving discourse on AI’s impact is at the heart of the upcoming Royal Society of NSW Forum Day: “AI: The Hope and The Hype.” The event’s sessions, AI in Communities, AI for Health, AI and the Law, AI in Practice, and AI Research & Future Directions, offer a timely platform to explore how AI’s promise intersects with productivity, equity, governance, and societal impact.

At its core, the tension remains between hype — exuberance untethered from evidence, and hope — grounded optimism shaped by governance, ethics, and fairness. As we confront this new technology, a critical question emerges: Is AI truly different from previous transformative technologies—like electricity or the internet—or is it simply another innovation riding waves of hype?

The Forum is held under the auspices of Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales. The Royal Society of New South Wales acknowledges the generous support of Her Excellency and the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer

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ANU Solar Oration 2025 — 6 November 2025

The next grid: building resilience in a renewable world

Merryn York AM FTSE

Non-Executive Director, TransPower New Zealand
Formerly, Executive General Manager (System Design)
Australian Energy Market Operator



Date: Wednesday, 6 November 2025, 6.00–7.30 pm AEDT

Venue: Physics Auditorium, ANU Acton Campus and online

Registration: [via Humanitix](#)

Entry: No charge

All are welcome

REGISTER NOW

Summary: The electricity system we rely on today has been developed over decades, delivering reliable power to homes and businesses and underpinning modern life. As we move toward a net-zero future by 2050, this highly complex system is undergoing a profound transformation.

While significant progress has already been made, the journey is far from over. The electricity sector—often viewed as one of the more straightforward to decarbonise—is now being called upon to do even more. Beyond its own transition, it is expected to support the decarbonisation of other sectors such as gas and transport through widespread electrification.

Maintaining the stability and reliability of the system while integrating large-scale renewable resources like solar and wind is a critical engineering challenge. At the 2025 Solar Oration, Merryn York, a distinguished electrical engineer with extensive experience across the energy sector, will explore the complexities of this transformation and share insights into how it might be achieved.

Taimus Werner-Gibbins, MLA for Brindabella, will deliver an opening statement on the ACT's progress towards net-zero emissions and present an annual ANU engineering student thesis award.

Merryn York is an electrical engineer with more than 30 years' experience in the energy sector. Most recently, leading system design and meeting the engineering challenges of a net-zero energy system at the Australian Energy Market Operator. Her previous roles were as a Commissioner at the Australian Energy Market Commission and Chief Executive of Powerlink Queensland.

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1336th OGM and Open Lecture — 12 November 2025

Arts-based Community Interventions for Youth Mental Health

Professor Katherine Boydell FASSA

Professor of Mental Health and
Director, Arts-based Knowledge Translation Lab
Black Dog Institute

Date: Wednesday, 12 November 2025, 6.00–7.30 pm AEDT

Venue: [Zoom webinar](#)

Enquiries: by [email to RSNSW Events](#)

Entry: No charge

All are welcome



LIVE STREAM

Please join the Zoom webinar at
6.00 pm AEDT, Wed., 12 November

ENQUIRIES

By email to
RSNSW Events

OGM Agenda: The Agenda for this meeting will be available on the [Meetings Page](#) of the website.

Summary: The mental health of young people has decreased significantly in recent years, worsened by global challenges like COVID-19 and climate change. In Australia, approximately 40% of 16–24-year-olds are experiencing mental health conditions. One-half of mental disorders begin by age 14, and 75% by age 24. Young people with mental ill-health face increased risks of social exclusion, discrimination, educational challenges, and human rights violations.

Recent policy documents have advocated for a person-centred system that prioritises prevention and early intervention via ‘whole of community’ approaches. This requires diverse, age-appropriate, innovative solutions that extend beyond formal mental health services to include informal support networks and local context. In this vein, there is growing evidence to support community-based social interventions, particularly creative and arts activities. Research shows arts engagement positively impacts self-esteem, confidence, relationship building, and belonging – all linked to resilience and wellbeing. Arts-based interventions offer inclusive, non-stigmatising mental health support.

While traditionally studied in clinical settings, research increasingly demonstrates arts benefits in community contexts. Our arts-based knowledge translation Lab at the Black Dog Institute develops and evaluates creative, community-based responses to youth mental health crises. Art represents an effective research tool across project stages and a direct intervention for young people to alleviate distress and enhance wellbeing through meaning-making, skill-building, and community connection. This presentation will describe, via three exemplars, the use of the arts in mental health research with young people.

Katherine Boydell is the founder and director of the world’s first multidisciplinary Arts-based Knowledge Translation (AKT) Lab, based at the Black Dog Institute, UNSW Sydney, that uses art forms to produce and disseminate knowledge, evaluate its impact and make research accessible beyond academia. Her lab received the Tom Trauer Research and Evaluation award from The Mental Health Service (TheMHS) in 2024. She is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences Australia and the inaugural recipient of the Milner Interdisciplinary prize from the Royal Society of New South Wales. She is Executive Editor of the journal Arts and Health, Editor of British Journal of Psychiatry Open, and Associate Editor of Early Intervention in Psychiatry, and has published more than 300 articles, book chapters, and books.

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Southern Highlands Branch Meeting: 2025-10 — 20 November 2025

**Laughing at other people’s pain:
Why do we do it, and is it ethical?**

Dr Jessica Milner Davis FRSN
Honorary Research Associate
University of Sydney

Date: Thursday, 20 November 2025, 6.30–7.30 pm AEDT

Venue: RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room



Entry: Members, \$5; Non-members, \$10 (cashless payments only please)

All are welcome

ENQUIRIES

by email to the Southern Highland Branch Chair

Summary: Comic pain can be appealingly funny. Think clowns and slapstick or Funniest Home Videos and cat memes online, as well as graphic formats such as cartoons and manga. Most TV and theatre comedies include some form of physical or cringing embarrassment for their comic heroes and heroines (think Mr Bean or Kath and Kim). Are we cruel and unethical to find this kind of humour amusing?

Farce is a particularly physical and violent form of comedy that manages to evoke riotous laughter yet still be considered harmless. Historically, it has been less subject to censorship than a form like satire, yet it gets away with humiliating its prim and proper victims shamelessly. A famous 19th-century French tragic actor once begged the great farce-writer, Georges Feydeau, to write a comedy starring him. Feydeau replied, “In my plays, there are only two kinds of stars: the one who delivers the kicks and the one who receives them. The most important is the one who receives them, and sadly, my dear friend, you cannot receive kicks.”

What are the contexts and rules that allow ordinarily civilised and humane persons to enjoy farce and slapstick? Lessons drawn from live theatre form an intriguing parallel with Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1975; 1979), which describes the human ability to consent under some conditions to acts which under other conditions would transgress an individual’s own value systems and be regarded as immoral. What are these operant conditions, and do they mean we should be more discriminating in our laughter as well as our behaviour? How does modern cancel culture affect humour and laughter? The positive benefits of mirth provided by traditionally acceptable humour must now be weighed against the charge that these are not necessarily ‘just jokes’ nor safely innocent.

Jessica Milner Davis PhD FRSN is an honorary research associate at The University of Sydney and at the Centre for Comedy Studies Research at Brunel University, London. She is a member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and has taught as a Visiting Fellow at many universities, including Bologna, Zurich, Stanford, Oxford, Hofstra and Bristol. Twice president of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS), she coordinates the Australasian Humour Studies Network and, in 2018, received the ISHS Lifetime Achievement Award for her interdisciplinary research. Her many publications deal with farce, satire, theory of humour and, more recently, cross-cultural studies of humour in European and Asian cultures. Her latest book is *Humour in Asian Cultures* (Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2022).

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Hunter Branch Meeting 2025-5 — 4 December 2025

Renewable energy 101: What is being delivered in NSW’s first renewable energy zone?

Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin FRSN FEIANZ

Principal, ESE Justice

Date: Thursday, 4 December 2025, 6.00–7.00 pm AEDT

Venue: NEX, Newcastle Exhibition and Convention Centre,
309 King Street, Newcastle West, NSW

Entry: Members, \$15; Non-members, \$25; Students: \$5

Registration: [Registration](#) is required by 2.00 pm AEDT on
Wednesday, 3 December 2025

Enquiries: [by email](#) to the Hunter Branch Chair

All are welcome



REGISTER NOW

before 2.00 pm AEDT, Wed., 3 Dec.

ENQUIRIES

by email to the Branch Chair

Summary: This event plans to explore:

- Why is Australia on the renewable energy journey?
- The various types of projects required, including generation, storage and transmission
- Household solar plus battery storage: is it a game changer?

The case study of what is happening in NSW's first Renewable Energy Zone—Central West-Orana — will inform the presentation, addressing the questions of what the benefits are and who reaps them, and what the costs are and who bears these. This will be an interactive session in which audience questions and input will be welcomed.

Warwick Giblin is the Principal of ESE Justice and an Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Science, Agriculture, Business, and Law at the University of New England. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW and Founding President of the Environment Institute of Australia (NSW Division) in 1989. He is also a Fellow of the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand.

For the past three years, Warwick Giblin has been advising Local Government in the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone on a dozen proposed wind, solar and transmission projects. The focus has been on the social, environmental and economic impact assessment, and securing financial benefits for local communities from both developers and the State Government. His environmental management career has spanned more than 45 years in both the corporate and public sectors. Over the past decade, he has acted for 17 local councils across NSW and 20 farmers across Australia on energy and mining projects.

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Branch and Program Reports

Report from the Activities with Impact Program

The Society provides an active program of events in Sydney and through its Hunter, New England North West, Southern Highlands, and Western NSW branches. With events planned

and held recently by the branches reported separately in this Bulletin, this section focuses on the Master Plan's *Activities with Impact* program and events held in Sydney.



1335th OGM and Open Lecture: Presentation Report — October 2025

Have universities become too political?

The Honourable Bill Shorten (1)

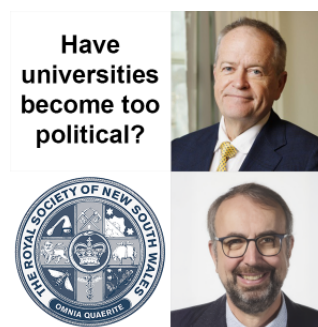
in conversation with

Professor Merlin Crossley AM FRSN (2)

(1) Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Canberra

(2) Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Quality, UNSW Sydney

In Sydney, on the evening of 1 October, the Society held its 1335th OGM that was followed by a captivating panel discussion on the topic '[Have universities become too political?](#)' between the Hon. Bill Shorten, the former Cabinet Minister and now Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, and Professor Merlin Crossley AM FRSN, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academy Quality) at UNSW Sydney.



Their conversation centred on the challenges and future of Australian universities. Bill Shorten reflected on his transition from politics to academia, emphasising the importance of public service and the transformative power of education. They discussed the perception of universities in Australia, noting that despite having millions of graduates, universities are often criticised as being expensive, self-referential, and disconnected from broader society.

The key issues discussed included the financial pressures facing universities, such as student debt, research funding, and the reliance on international students. Bill Shorten highlighted the need for universities to collaborate rather than compete, suggesting that duplication of courses and infrastructure is wasteful. He advocated for specialisation among institutions and questioned the sustainability of having 40 comprehensive universities in Australia.

The discussion also touched on the political landscape, with references to government policies like the Job Ready Graduate program and fee-free TAFE, and the need for bipartisan support for higher education. Bill Shorten stressed the importance of universities in fostering critical thinking, innovation, and social cohesion, and called for a renewed narrative that celebrates their contributions. Personal anecdotes about family and the value of lifelong learning underscored Bill Shorten's vision for universities as inclusive, adaptive institutions that support students and staff throughout their lives. Their conversation concluded with a call to rethink strategies, embrace collaboration, and better communicate the societal value of higher education.

If you missed the face-to-face event, a [recording of their discussion](#) is now available on our YouTube channel.

Lindsay Botten FRSN
Vice-President, RSNSW

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The Society and Social Media

The Society's presence on our social media channels—[Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [X/Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#)—is engaging an increasing following, and we continue to build our repository of events on YouTube.

Our YouTube channel now has almost 1,530 subscribers, while the 210 full-length videos and 'shorts' that are online have received almost 180,000 views.

The social media icons at the end of this newsletter will take the reader to our pages on these platforms, from where you can follow, subscribe, and be notified of new content.

As a Society member, please consider subscribing to our social media channels to support the Society's outreach and encourage your friends, colleagues and members of your networks to do so.

YouTube recordings of recent events

All online presentations and all face-to-face presentations held in Sydney and by the Hunter, New England North West, and Western NSW Branches are recorded and uploaded to the Society's YouTube channel. These can be accessed directly from our [YouTube channel](#) or the [Presentations](#) page of the RSNSW website.

For convenience, the video links below provide access to current recordings and recent popular recordings. We hope that these will be of interest to members.



YouTube recording of the presentation from the 1335th Ordinary General Meeting (1 October 2025) on *Have universities become too political?*, conducted as a panel

discussion between The Hon. Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, and Professor Merlin Crossley AM FRSN, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality) at UNSW. Sydney. A summary of the lecture and a brief biography of the presenter are available from the [online event notice](#).



YouTube recording of the presentation from the 1334th Ordinary General Meeting (3 September 2025) on *Bringing Financial Reporting into the 21st Century*, delivered by Emeritus Professor Peter Wells FRSN of the University of Technology Sydney Business School. A summary of the lecture and a brief biography of the presenter are available from the [online event notice](#).



YouTube recording of the presentation from the 28 August 2025 Ideas@theHouse titled *Busting Myths, Bridging Gaps: Public Health Approaches to Hearing Loss in Adults*, delivered by Professor Bamini Gopinath, the Cochlear Chair in Hearing and Health at Macquarie University. The [online event notice](#) provides a summary of the lecture and the presenter's biography.

AN ELEGANT SOLUTION TO ENDURING PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION

PROFESSOR JENNIFER GORE

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YouTube recording of the presentation from the Hunter Branch Meeting 2025-3 of the Royal Society of NSW (21 August 2025) on *An elegant solution to enduring problems in education*, delivered by Laureate Professor Jennifer Gore AM FASSA of the University of Newcastle School of Education. A summary of the talk and a brief biography of the presenter are available from the [online event notice](#).

SOLVING AUSTRALIA'S PRODUCTIVITY CRISIS

ROSS GITTINS

ROYAL
SOCIETY
NEW SOUTH WALES



YouTube recording of the presentation from the fourth meeting of the Society's Provocations and Inspirations lunchtime series held at the Union, University, and Schools Club in Sydney (19 August 2025) at which Ross Gittins AM FRSN FASSA, Economics Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, spoke on *Solving Australia's Productivity Crisis*. A summary of the presentation and a brief biography of the presenter are available from the [online event notice](#).

PFAS IN NEW SOUTH WALES: IS IT UNDER CONTROL?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IAN WRIGHT

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YouTube recording of the presentation from the 1333rd Ordinary General Meeting (6 August 2025) on *BPFAS in New South Wales: Is it under control?*, delivered by Associate Professor Ian Wright of the School of Science at Western Sydney University. A summary of the lecture and a brief biography of the presenter are available from the [online event notice](#).

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EXTREME WILDFIRES IN A WARMING WORLD INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

PROFESSOR JASON SHARPLES

Ideas@theHouse



YouTube recording of the presentation from the 26 June 2025 Ideas@theHouse titled *Extreme wildfires in a warming world: insights and challenges* and delivered by Professor Jason Sharples FRSN FTSE, Professor of Bushfire Dynamics and Foundation Director of UNSW Bushfire at UNSW Canberra. The [online event notice](#) provides a summary of the lecture and the presenter's biography.



Edited by: [Lindsay Botten](#) FRSN, Vice-President, Royal Society of New South Wales

Disclaimer: Positions expressed in this publication by the authors of articles and event presenters do not necessarily reflect those of the Society.

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