

20th Biennial Conference of the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows

“The Humboldtian Vision: integrating fundamentals with applied research”

The conference was held at RMIT University from 13th to 15th February, 2025. There were 31 full registrants which included 27 Members, one Non-Member, one Student and two On-Line attendees. Three additional registrants arrived for the Conference Dinner. There were 24 presentations on various topics, typical of any Humboldtian Conference.

Welcome Ceremony

The conference opened on the Thursday afternoon at 4:00 pm, in the garden Building, Building 10. Words of welcome were offered by **Professor Gary Bryant** and a Welcome to RMIT was received from Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation and Vice-President, RMIT University, **Distinguished Professor Calum Drummond**.

Calum drew attention to the beginnings of RMIT University, thanks to the generosity of Francis Ormond who founded the original Working Men's College which has become the current RMIT University.



Calum Drummond, with Welcome to RMIT University (Image courtesy of Paul Lennox)



Victorian and German Institutions. There followed the reading (by Association President, **Emeritus Professor Gabrielle McMullen**,) of a message to the Conference from the Acting Secretary-General of the Foundation, Dr. Thomas Hesse (Picture at left, courtesy of Paul Lennox.)

Gabrielle then summarised the history of the AAvHF Biennial Meetings followed by an initial Keynote Presentation for the Conference entitled “Examples of the Humboldt Vision sampled from an Organic Chemist's Perspective”, given by **Associate Professor Roger Read** who was announced by **Professor Jeff Malpas**, Chair of the Association's Awards Subcommittee, as a new Distinguished Member. At the same time, Jeff announced two Peter Schwerdtfeger Award recipients for this two-year period, Drs Matthew Tam and Daniel Priebbenow and the first recipient of the Peter Gaenssler Award, Miss Bindiya Rashni.

The Welcome Reception continued with drinks and finger food while we were entertained with some most pleasant and appropriate music from Nilmini Wickramasinghe



Gary Bryant welcomes all present to the Conference



Words from Michael Pearce SC



Roger Read delivering his Keynote Lecture outlining his Humboldtian Career as an Organic Chemist

(Violin) and Kate Denmead (Spinet): *Sonata III in D Major (First Movement)* (J.M. Laclair), *Violin Concerto No. 2 (Second Movement)* (Joseph Haydn) and *Allemande from Violin Partita No. 2 in D Minor (BWV1004)* (J.S. Bach).

Friday Sessions

For the conference presentations, we relocated to Building 80, Level 9, Room 12, on the opposite side of Swanson Street, for an early Friday morning start. Following an initial Keynote Presentation by a recently returned Humboldt Fellow, **Dr Animesh Gain** from Murdoch University, entitled



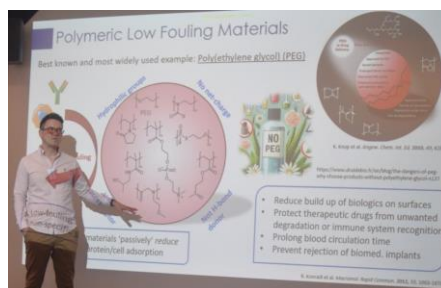
Animesh Gain, Murdoch University, delivering his Keynote lecture

“Navigating Water Security in Australia”, there followed nine 15-minute presentations on topics covering Architecture and Sound, Clay Minerals, the Legalities of Sustainable Reporting, the effects of Ceramides on our health, a stepback in time to Rufinus of Aquileia, Space Filling amongst the Elements and the most unusual science of H₂O. The second before-lunch presentation reminded us that this is the year of Quantum and then prior to a most enjoyable lunch we learned about SUPER symmetries.



Musicians at the Welcome Function, Nilmini Wickramasinghe (Violin) and Kate Denmead (Spinet)

The afternoon session involved a third Keynote by **Dr Kristian Kempe** entitled “Development of Next-Generation Polymer-Based Drug Delivery Platforms” followed by three 15-minute presentations. The first of these introduced us to interesting science books for children. We then learned about the research at La Trobe University on Digital Twins and finally some fascinating research at Monash University to synthesize useful chemicals via visible-light irradiation.



Kristian Kempe, Monash University, delivers the third Keynote.

Afternoon Tea was followed by the essential Biennial Business Meeting of our Association which resulted in some “new faces” elected to our National Committee for the coming two-year period, providing “new ideas” and suggesting a “state of good health” for the future of our Association. It was pleasing for the Meeting to decide that the venue for our 21st Biennial Conference would be Brisbane, thanks to a positive offer to host a meeting in late 2026 from our Queensland colleagues.

Conference Dinner

For the Conference Dinner we all re-located to the Lincoln Hotel, 91 Cardigan Street. I understand that the venue selected for the Dinner came with a strong recommendation from RMIT staff, in that it is often a location for important RMIT Dinners. There was no doubting the quality of the meal. The main course, for example,



Enjoyment of the Conference Dinner – (Left (L→R)): Christina Read, Connie and Hans Bacher. (Right (L→R, around the table)): Bhaba Biswas, Matthew Tam, Frances Rosamond, Ross Marceau, Gary Bryant, Chris Rizos, Christoph Nitsche, Animesh Gain. (Pictures courtesy of Jean Du Plessis)

was based on a slow-cooked leg of lamb, one delivered to each group of six or so people at each table. It was some of the best lamb I have tasted for a long time and the waiter at our table informed us that it had been slow-cooked throughout the previous night!



More enjoyment at the Conference Dinner – (Left (L→R)): Sarah Turpin-Nolan, Paul Lennox, Murray Hamilton. (Right (L→R)): Ravichandar Babarao, Jill and Trevor Finlayson, Gabrielle McMullen, Siham Bryant, (Pictures courtesy of Jean Du Plessis)

During the Conference Dinner, the Association Awards for the previous two-year period which had been announced during the Welcome Ceremony, were presented to their respective recipients by President, Gabrielle McMullen and are

pictured below. It should be noted that the inaugural Peter Gaenssler Award which was to Miss Bindiya Rashni from the University of the South Pacific, was also mentioned. But quite clearly, it had not been practical for Bindiya to travel to our Conference and her Award Certificate had already been posted to her in Suva.



The Presentations of Award Certificates by Gabrielle McMullen to (Left) Roger Read (Distinguished Member), (Centre and Right) Matthew Tam and Daniel Priebbenow (Peter Schwerdtfeger Awards)

Saturday Sessions



Hans Bachor, Australian National University, delivers the Saturday Keynote

The Saturday morning began at 9:30 am with a Keynote presentation by **Professor Hans Bachor** who enlightened us on the Hype and Trust of Quantum Technology. There followed three 15-minute presentations, the first being presented on-line by Mohamed Zakaria from the University of Queensland on an electrolyte suitable for water splitting. This was followed by recent research on bismuth compounds for medical applications and

then some reflections on the new Humboldt branding introduced on the 70th anniversary of the Foundation, re-established in 1953. Following a quality morning tea, the conference came to a lunchtime close with four final 15-minute presentations entitled “How to Train a FAN”, “3D Printing of Functionally Integrated Devices”, “Systematic Quantification of Hydrogen in X65 Pipeline Steel by Atom Probe Tomography” and “A Simple and Effective Mathematical Model for Bushfires”.

Then we all assembled for the usual Conference Photograph and apologies to those few registrants who had to leave before this photograph was taken.

Conference Publication

An invitation was extended to all presenters to submit a manuscript based on their presentation,

for peer review and inclusion in an on-line book publication which, all going well, will appear on our Association website later in the year, as a proper history of this 20th Biennial Conference.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks must go to Professor Gary Bryant for his initiative in offering to host our Association's 20th Biennial Conference at RMIT University, following the abandonment of plans for a joint A&NZAvHFs Conference in New Zealand and to RMIT University for hosting the event. Gary was most ably assisted in the organisation and efficient conduct of the Conference by Drs Sarah Turpin-Nolan, Daniel Priebbenow and Ravichandar Babarao.

Financial support for the Conference from Research and Innovation, RMIT University and the Monash Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences is gratefully acknowledged.

T.R. Finlayson
17th April, 2025



The 20th Biennial Conference Photograph

(Standing, L→R): Ravichandar Babarao, Animesh Gain, Christoph Nitsche, Rosanne Guijt, Nalika Ulapane (behind), Ross Marceau, Frances Rosamond, Michael Hanaghan, Peter Jarvis (obscured), David Glynn, Roger Read, Murray Hamilton, David Yost, Bhaba Biswas, Gary Bryant, Matthew Tam, Jeff Malpas, Hans Bachor, Sarah Turpin-Nolan, Richard Sadus, Gabrielle McMullen, Trevor Finlayson. (In Front): Glen Wheeler. (Thanks to Siham Bryant for the photograph.)