



# Future of Genetics: Speaker Biographies

8 February 2006

## Food and Agriculture

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genetics revolution for  
Australia*

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### **Chair: Peter Arkle**

National Farmers Federation

Tel: (02) 6273 3855

Email: [parkle@nff.org.au](mailto:parkle@nff.org.au)

Web page: [www.nff.org.au](http://www.nff.org.au)

Peter commenced at the National Farmers Federation (NFF) in 2002, in the role of Policy Manager - Rural Affairs. His role involves working with NFF member organisations to develop policies that advance the interests of Australian farmers, and to take forward these policies to Federal Ministers, Senators and members, and to Australian Government agencies and other interest groups

Peter is advisor to the NFF Farm Business and Economics Committee and the NFF Farm Chemical Sub-Committee, and has previously worked with the NFF Drought and Biotechnology Taskforces.

Peter represents NFF on the Boards of Agrifood Awareness Australia, Agsafe Limited and the drumMUSTER Advisory Committee, and has been involved in numerous industry and government advisory committees, hearings, forums and workshops, both domestically and internationally.

### **Jim Peacock**

Former CSIRO Plant Industry

Tel: through Jane Kahler, Communications Manager CSIRO Plant Industries  
(02) 6246 5077

Email: [jim.peacock@csiro.au](mailto:jim.peacock@csiro.au)



Jim is a Research Fellow of CSIRO Plant Industry in Canberra Australia, one of the world's leading plant research institutes. His laboratory is recognised internationally in the field of plant molecular biology and its applications in agriculture.

He was made a Companion of the Order of Australia, Australia's highest honour, for his contribution to the nation. Dr Peacock is a Fellow of The Royal Society of London, and the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering. In 1990 he was elected as a Foreign Associate of the US National Academy of Sciences and a Foreign Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy. In 2000 he was a co-recipient of the Inaugural Prime Minister's Science Prize.

In February 1988 he was awarded the BHP Bicentennial Prize for the Pursuit of Excellence in Science and Technology. In December 1989 he was awarded a CSIRO Medal for his leadership of CSIRO Plant Industry. He is a Member of the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council and one of the four appointments to the Australian Innovation Council. In the commercial field he is Chairman of the Gene Shears biotechnology company, Chairman of Ascentia Pty Ltd, and a Scientific Adviser to Peptech Pty Ltd.

**Shaun Coffey**

Chief of CSIRO Livestock Industries

Tel: (07) 3214 2390

Email: [anne.grace@csiro.au](mailto:anne.grace@csiro.au)

Web page: [www.csiro.au/csiro/content/standard/ps61,,.html](http://www.csiro.au/csiro/content/standard/ps61,,.html)



Prior to his appointment as Chief of CSIRO Livestock Industries, Shaun was Sector Co-ordinator for the Meat, Dairy and Aquaculture Sector within CSIRO. In this role he has initiated major changes to focus research and development on market needs and planned outcomes. He has also served as Program Manager for Livestock Improvement and as Deputy Director of the Cooperative Research Centre for Beef Quality. Shaun is also Adjunct Professor in the School of Animal Studies in the University of Queensland. For the last three years he has been Vice-President of the Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists.

Prior to joining CSIRO, Shaun spent five years as Director of Research and Extension for the Queensland DPI and in this role, initiated and managed radical changes in the organisation and delivery of research and extension services (based on participatory management and learning systems of practice). During the 1980s he was Chief Executive of the Cattlemen's Union of Australia.

An Agronomist by training, Shaun undertook his graduate and post-graduate studies in the University of Melbourne. His research interests now lie in the development of innovation systems and novel approaches to research, development and extension practice.

**German Spangenberg**

Program Leader, CRC for Molecular Plant Breeding

Institute Director, Plant Biotechnology Centre, Agriculture Victoria  
DPI

Tel: (03) 9479 3851

Email: [german.spangenberg@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:german.spangenberg@dpi.vic.gov.au)



German received his PhD from the University of Heidelberg and Max-Planck-Institute of Cell Biology in Ladenburg b. Heidelberg, Germany. He carried out postdoctoral research studies (plant cell biology, plant molecular biology, plant biotechnology) at the Max-Planck-Institute of Cell Biology and the Institute of Plant Sciences at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zürich, Switzerland. After this, he became Assistant Professor and Associate Professor at the Institute of Plant Sciences, ETH-Zürich. In 1995 he moved to Australia.

German's research has largely centered on plant somatic cell genetics and on the molecular genetic manipulation of plants. He is recognized as the world authority on the genetic manipulation of pasture grasses and legumes and pasture plant genomics. He is also Director of the Centre for Sustainable Plant Production, Adjunct Professor at the School of Botany La Trobe University, Chair of the Victorian Microarray Technology Consortium, Node Leader of the Victorian Bioinformatics Consortium, and Director and Chief Scientific Officer for Phytogene Pty. Ltd.

**Rod Griffin**

CEO, CRC Sustainable Production Forestry

Tel: (03) 6226 7946

Email: [Rod.Griffin@crcforestry.com.au](mailto:Rod.Griffin@crcforestry.com.au)

Web page: [www.forestry.crc.org.au/](http://www.forestry.crc.org.au/)



Rod is a graduate of Aberdeen University, Scotland and Oregon State U USA; scientist and research manager with CSIRO specializing in eucalypt genetics and reproductive biology 1967-1991. He joined Shell International Forestry UK as tree improvement co-ordinator for their international portfolio of plantation investments, and subsequently combined this role with management of Shell's Tree Biotechnology Research Unit where the focus was on GM and propagation technology for Eucalyptus.

Rod returned to Australia in 2002 as Director of CRC Sustainable Production Forestry and co-ordinated successful rebid for CRC Forestry, of which he is now CEO. He is actively engaged in international tree improvement and genetics R&D as a consultant to multi-national forestry companies in South America and Asia.

## Environment

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**Chair: Craig Cormick**

Manager of Public Awareness, Biotechnology Australia

Tel: (02) 6213 6805

Email: [craig.cormick@biotechnology.gov.au](mailto:craig.cormick@biotechnology.gov.au)

Web page: [www.biotechnology.gov.au/](http://www.biotechnology.gov.au/)



Craig Cormick is the Manager of Public Awareness for the Government agency Biotechnology Australia. He has previously worked as a science journalist and has taught public relations and writing at university. He is widely published on drivers of public attitudes towards biotechnology, and is a regular commentator in the media and at industry and research conferences, both in Australia and overseas, on causes of public concern towards applications of biotechnology.

**Robert Saint**

Director, ARC Special Research Centre for the Molecular Genetics of Development

Head, Molecular Genetics and Evolution, RSBS, ANU

Tel: (02) 6125 2383

Email: [robert.saint@anu.edu.au](mailto:robert.saint@anu.edu.au)

Web page: [www.rsbs.anu.edu.au/Profiles/Robert\\_Saint/](http://www.rsbs.anu.edu.au/Profiles/Robert_Saint/)



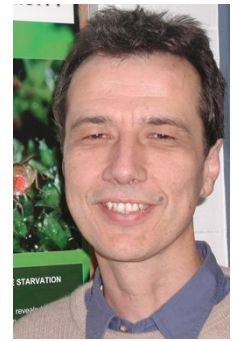
**Ary Hoffmann**

Research Director and Federation Fellow, Centre for Environmental and Stress Adaptation Research

Tel: (03) 8344 4621

Email: [ary@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ary@unimelb.edu.au)

Web page: [www.cesar.org.au/page/Prof.+Ary+Hoffmann](http://www.cesar.org.au/page/Prof.+Ary+Hoffmann)



Ary received his BSc (Hons) from Monash University in 1980 and his PhD from La Trobe University in 1984. He worked at the University of California at Davis before moving to La Trobe University in 1986 and the University of Melbourne in 2005. In 2000 he gained a grant from the ARC to establish a Special Research Centre, the Centre for Environmental Stress and Adaptation Research. In 2004 he was elected to the Australian Academy of Science and awarded a Federation Fellowship. His research addresses the way organisms (and in particular insects) deal with environmental stresses. He is particularly interested in the genes involved in adapting to warming and cooling environments, the way symbiotic bacteria that live inside insect cells influence their hosts, and the way stressful environments influence rates of evolution. His research has led to the development of new ways of controlling pest species of mites and moths, new methods of using genes and insects to monitor for environmental pollutants, and new ways to promote the conservation of species threatened by climate change.

**Linda Louise Blackall**

Professor of Microbiology, Advanced Wastewater Management Centre, and Director of Research, Environmental Biotechnology CRC

Tel: (07) 3365 4645

Email: [blackall@awmc.uq.edu.au](mailto:blackall@awmc.uq.edu.au)

Web page: [www.awmc.uq.edu.au](http://www.awmc.uq.edu.au), [www.ebcrc.com.au](http://www.ebcrc.com.au)



Linda completed a PhD in the field of wastewater microbial ecology in 1987 and her research since then has primarily focussed on this topic. She has >100 research publications and is the editor of the benchmark book - *The Microbiology of Activated Sludge*. Her fundamental and applied collaborative research is funded via Australian Research Council and different CRC grants. An international research grant from the US, Department of Energy at the Joint Genome Institute facilitated an introduction to microbial genome sequencing.

She was the winner in 2001, of the Frank Fenner Research Award by the Australian Society for Microbiology for outstanding research in the first 15 years after award of the PhD. In 2004, Linda was awarded the Lise Meitner visiting professorship at Lund University, Sweden and in 2005 she won the Ardern-Lockett Award for outstanding contributions to wastewater microbiology research.

Linda is currently a Professor of Microbiology in the Advanced Wastewater Management Centre at the University of Queensland and is the Director of Research in the Environmental Biotechnology CRC.

## Health

### Chair: Douglas Hilton

NHMRC Senior Principal Research Fellow and Head Division Of  
Molecular Medicine

The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research

Tel: (03) 9345 2555

Email: [hilton@wehi.edu.au](mailto:hilton@wehi.edu.au)

Web page: [www.wehi.edu.au/index.html](http://www.wehi.edu.au/index.html)



Doug began his scientific career in 1984 as a vacation student in Prof Ian Young's laboratory at the JCSMR and in 1986 as a BSc (Hons) student purified a novel cytokine named leukaemia inhibitory factor (LIF), which he characterized as a PhD student. He spent two years as a post-doc at The Whitehead Institute, MIT in Cambridge with Prof Harvey Lodish. During this period he worked on the structure/function relationship of the erythropoietin receptor. Since returning to Australia in 1993 he has established an international reputation with his discoveries in the area of cytokine signalling. Over the last three years Doug, with Dr Warren Alexander and Dr Benjamin Kile, established a new program using large-scale mouse genetics to dissect the molecular regulation of blood cell formation. At the start of 2006, he was appointed to lead a Systems Biology initiative at WEHI and was named as Head of the Division Of Molecular Medicine.

His contributions to research have been recognised by numerous invitations to speak at major national and international conferences and he is the recipient of many prizes and honours, including the inaugural Commonwealth Health Minister's Award for Excellence in Health and Medical Research. In addition to his academic work, Doug has led large-scale collaborative endeavours involving industry. Many of his discoveries have been commercially developed resulting in tens of millions dollars of export income to Australia.

### Brandon Wainwright

Acting Director & Deputy-Director (Research), and Group Leader  
Molecular Genetics of Human Diseases, Institute for Molecular Bioscience,  
The University of Queensland

Tel: (07) 3346 2053

Email: [b.wainwright@imb.uq.edu.au](mailto:b.wainwright@imb.uq.edu.au)

Web page: [www.imb.uq.edu.au/index.html?page=11673](http://www.imb.uq.edu.au/index.html?page=11673)



Brandon is Professor of Molecular Genetics and Acting Director, Institute for Molecular Bioscience, The University of Queensland. Brandon was a founding member of the Human Genome Organisation (HUGO) and for 5 years was Chair of Chromosome 9 for HUGO.

His early research on the single gene disease cystic fibrosis led to the development of many of the approaches common in human genetics today and more recently his group isolated the gene which causes most common skin and brain cancers using a genomic approach. Brandon has been Chair of both the Project and Program Grant Panels of the NH&MRC, Research Director of the Co-operative Research Centre for the Discovery of Genes for Common Human Diseases, and is currently on the Board of two Major National Research Facilities, The Australian Genome Research Facility and the Australian Phenome Facility.

**Alex Andrianopoulos**

University of Melbourne Genetics Department Howard Hughes Fellow

Tel: (03) 8344 5164/5140

Email: alex.a@unimelb.edu.au

Web: [www.genetics.unimelb.edu.au/Person/AA.html](http://www.genetics.unimelb.edu.au/Person/AA.html)



Alex is a senior lecturer in the Department of Genetics at the University of Melbourne. He received his PhD from the University of Melbourne studying gene regulation in metabolism using the fungus *Aspergillus nidulans*. He then spent four years at the University of Georgia in the USA studying the regulatory mechanisms controlling development in *Aspergillus nidulans* and the yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. As a consultant for the biotechnology start up company Myco Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge, MA, USA, he developed a high throughput screening assay for identifying compounds of medical interest which was successfully patented. Upon returning to Australia he continued to work on gene regulation in metabolism using *Aspergillus nidulans*. In 1998 he returned to the University of Melbourne and began working on a fungal pathogen of humans, *Penicillium marneffeii*, examining the molecular mechanisms which control development and pathogenicity. In 2005 he received the Dean's award for Research Excellence and was appointed as an international scholar of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, USA.

**Chris Goodnow**

Director, Australian Phenomics Facility

Tel: (02) 6125 0596

Email: [laura.vitler@anu.edu.au](mailto:laura.vitler@anu.edu.au)

Web page: [www.apf.edu.au/](http://www.apf.edu.au/)

Chris pioneered the use of transgenic mice to understand the regulation of the immune system. After a BSc(Vet) and Veterinary degree at Sydney University, he trained in molecular and cellular immunology with Mark. M. Davis, Sir Gustav Nossal, and Antony Basten, and during this time devised a novel transgenic system that illuminated the process of self-nonself discrimination by the immune system. On completing his PhD, Chris was recruited to Stanford University as an Assistant Investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. In June 1997 he moved to the John Curtin School of Medical Research in Canberra, Australia to become Professor and Director of a new, purpose built facility for large-scale mouse functional genomics, the Medical Genome Centre. Its success led to the award of an Australian Government Major National Research Facility grant to establish the Australian Phenomics Facility in Canberra, with Chris as Director. Chris is also a founder and chief scientific officer for Phenomix Corp, a biotechnology start-up company with operations in San Diego and Canberra.

He has authored many papers in *Nature*, *Science* and *Cell*, is on the editorial boards of *Current Biology*, *Genome Biology*, *Immunological Reviews*, *Journal of Autoimmunity*, *International Immunology*, *Journal of Experimental Medicine*, and *Immunity*, and has been awarded numerous grants. His honours and awards include the University Medal from Sydney University, Assistant Investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Searle Scholar, American Association of Immunologists/Pharmingen Investigator Award, the Gottschalk Medal of the Australian Academy of Science, the Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science and more recently the 2005 Commonwealth Health Minister's Award for Excellence in Health & Medical Research.

**Sue Forrest**

Director, Australian Genome Research Facility

Tel: (03) 9345 2449

Email: [sue.forrest@agrif.org.au](mailto:sue.forrest@agrif.org.au)

Web page: [www.agrf.org.au](http://www.agrf.org.au)



Sue is the Director of the Australian Genome Research Facility, appointed in January, 2003. The AGRF provides access to state of the art genomic technologies for the Australian scientific community. Sue obtained First Class Honours from Melbourne University and then was awarded the Henry and Rachel Ackman Travelling Scholarship in Medicine to perform the research for her D Phil with Professor Kay Davies in Oxford. She characterised the genetic basis of Duchenne muscular dystrophy and published papers in the top scientific journals. On her return to Melbourne she worked at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute for thirteen years, developing mutation detection techniques, heading up the DNA Diagnostic Laboratory and then embarking on an ambitious approach to gene discovery, testing novel methods for gene identification in complex traits. She has taken a pro active role in securing funds for genome sequencing projects. Sue has a passion for developing interactive teams and works closely with the biotechnology community to assist its coming of age. She has over 80 refereed publications.

**Lyle Palmer**

Foundation Chair in Genetic Epidemiology, University of Western Australia

Tel: (08) 9346 1061

Email: [lyle@cyllene.uwa.edu.au](mailto:lyle@cyllene.uwa.edu.au)

Web: <http://www.waimr.uwa.edu.au/etc/subpage.cfm/SID/3/PID/24/SPID/140>



Lyle is a genetic epidemiologist with interests both in methodological development in statistical genetics and in applied genetics research with a focus on complex diseases. Prof Palmer currently has overall responsibility for enabling the internationally unique clinical and epidemiological research programs in WA to be expanded into the areas of genetic epidemiology and genomics. His background includes training in clinical epidemiology, quantitative genetics and biostatistics. His graduate research on the genetics of asthma was recognized by 9 national and international awards, and in 1999/2000 he was both a Fulbright Fellow and a Churchill Fellow at Case Western Reserve and Harvard Universities in the US. While at Harvard University Prof Palmer was jointly responsible for creating a new National Genomic Resource Center in Heart, Lung and Blood Disease. He also played the key role in teaching genetics and genetic statistics at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Lyle is an internationally recognized expert in the genetics of complex respiratory diseases, and plays a leadership role in both the international genetic epidemiological and respiratory research communities. Besides his interests in respiratory diseases, he plays key roles in a number of clinical teams in Australia, the UK and the US involving genetics research into cardiovascular disease, fetal growth regulation and both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. He is the Principal Analyst for both the International Consortium on Asthma Genetics and the International Consortium on the Genetics of Ankylosing Spondylitis.

**John Christodoulou**

Director, Western Sydney Genetics Program  
 President of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia  
 Tel: (02) 9845 3452  
 Email: JohnC@chw.edu.au

John is the Director, Western Sydney Genetics Program, Children's Hospital at Westmead, Sydney, one of the few integrated clinical and laboratory diagnostic genetics services in Australia. His clinical interests include inborn errors of metabolism and neurodevelopmental disorders, particularly Rett syndrome, the latter of which is the major focus of his research. He has over 100 research publications, and is responsible for establishing the LSDB RettBASE, which is a public domain searchable web-based database containing MECP2 sequence variations associated with Rett syndrome.

John has the academic title of Professor in the School of Paediatrics and Child Health, Faculty of Medicine, University of Sydney, and is the Chair of the Board of Postgraduate Studies in Dentistry, Medicine and Pharmacy, which is responsible for the administration of over 700 postgraduate research students. In 2005 he was elected President of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia.

**Pests and plagues**

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**Chair: Deborah Smith**

Journalist, Sydney Morning Herald  
 Tel: (02) 9282 2983  
 Email: debsmith@smh.com.au



Deborah Smith is Science Editor at the Sydney Morning Herald. She is a science graduate of the University of Sydney and has worked as a news reporter, feature writer, foreign correspondent and section editor for papers including The National Times, Times on Sunday and Sunday Age as well as the SMH where she has been for the past 15 years. She was the winner of the 2005 Eureka Prize for Science Journalism.

**Phil Batterham**

University of Melbourne  
 Director of the Centre for Environmental and Stress Adaptation Research  
 Tel: (03) 8344 2363  
 Email: p.batterham@unimelb.edu.au  
 Web page: [www.cesar.org.au/page/A+Prof.+Phil+Batterham](http://www.cesar.org.au/page/A+Prof.+Phil+Batterham)



**Ben Adler**

Professor of Microbiology, Monash University

Director, Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence in Structural and Functional Microbial Genomics

Tel: (03) 9905 4815 (PA. Ms Sheree Michael. Tel: (03) 9905 1421)

Email: [Sheree.Michael@med.monash.edu.au](mailto:Sheree.Michael@med.monash.edu.au)

Web: [www.med.monash.edu.au/microbiology/staff/adler/adlerhp.htm](http://www.med.monash.edu.au/microbiology/staff/adler/adlerhp.htm)



Ben has taught and researched microbiology at Monash University in a variety of roles since 1982. He is recognised internationally for his work on bacterial pathogens, specifically *Leptospira* and other spirochaetes, *Pasteurella* and *Shigella*. He has particular expertise in investigating molecular mechanisms involved in pathogenesis, immunity and vaccine development. Recent research activity includes whole genome sequencing of *Leptospira*, microarray analysis of in vivo expressed genes of *Pasteurella* and mass spectrometry to identify and characterise outer membrane proteins of *Leptospira*. He is currently Chairman of the World Health Organisation Expert Working Party on Leptospiral Vaccines.

## Industry

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**Chair: Anna Lavelle**

Chief Executive Officer, AusBiotech

Tel: (03) 9828 1400

Email: [alavelle@ausbiotech.org](mailto:alavelle@ausbiotech.org)

Web page: [www.ausbiotech.org/](http://www.ausbiotech.org/)

Anna was appointed inaugural Chief Executive Officer of AusBiotech Ltd in June 2005. Previously she was an executive with the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS) commencing in 1998 as Director responsible for Strategic Planning and Business Development. In 2002 she was appointed Director of Intellectual Capital and was responsible for the management of the national R&D program, evaluation of emerging technologies and international and national business development activities including technology transfer and intellectual property management.

Prior to joining ARCBS, Anna held the positions of CEO for a public health organisation, industry lobbyist for a member organisation and was an academic at Monash University, Melbourne. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Genetics from the University of Melbourne.

**John Oakeshott**

Strategy Director, CSIRO Entomology

Tel: (02) 6246 4157

Email: [John.Oakeshott@csiro.au](mailto:John.Oakeshott@csiro.au)

Web page: [www.ento.csiro.au/staffhome/joakeshott.html](http://www.ento.csiro.au/staffhome/joakeshott.html)



John has led CSIRO Entomology's biotechnology programs since the late 80s. He has pioneered the development and commercialization of novel enzyme technologies for bioremediating pesticides and other toxins from contaminated liquids and commodities. He has initiated and led the development of several gene/enzyme technologies for producing industrial chemicals in biofactories. He has managed the development and commercialization of several other diagnostic and biopesticide technologies. He has published about 150 papers and is co-inventor of several patent families. John served on federal committees regulating Australian gene technology for 14 years, providing their major entomological expertise during the introduction of transgenic cottons.

**Jeremy Burdon**

Chief CSIRO Plant Industries

Tel: (02) 6246 5546

Email: [Margaret.Redford@csiro.au](mailto:Margaret.Redford@csiro.au)



Jeremy is an evolutionary biologist with particular interest in plant-microbe interactions. His active research interests include problems involving pathogens of agricultural crops, using fungi as biological control agents for invasive weeds, and the complex interplay of parasitic and symbiotic interactions in natural ecosystems.

His work has been recognised through the Gottschalk Medal from the Australian Academy of Sciences (1987), an honorary doctorate from Umea University, Sweden (1996), election to the Fellowship of the Australian Academy of Science (1996), the American Phytopathological Society (2003), the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (2004), and the EK Stakman Award from the University of Minnesota (2003). He has served on the editorial boards of the Australian Journal of Botany, Euphytica and Ecology Letters, and is currently on the editorial board of Oecologia.

**Richard Harrison**

Marketing Manager, Applied Biosystems

Tel: (03) 9730 8648

Email: harrisrw@appliedbiosystems.com

Web page: www.appliedbiosystems.com.au/

Following a short research career in Plant Molecular Biology, Richard joined Applied Biosystems over 10 years ago as an Applications Engineer where he was initially responsible for installation of DNA analysis platforms and training of users across Australasia. With the expansion of the Genomics business, Richard moved into Marketing and managed the DNA Sequencing Platforms business in Australia and New Zealand during a period of rapid growth. This period was notable for the widespread adoption across Australia & New Zealand of DNA Sequencing as a tool in medical Diagnostics, as the standard platform for Forensic DNA analysis, and the Kangaroo Genome Project was launched. Richard currently holds the role of Asia-Pacific Marketing Manager for the Applied Markets, driving these technologies into mainstream applications in BioSecurity, Food Safety and Human Identity testing.

**Basic science**

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**Tim Thwaites**

Features writer, New Scientist

Tel: (03) 9383 4600

Email: thwaites@optusnet.com.au



Tim is a freelance science writer and broadcaster who specialises in putting science, medicine and engineering into everyday language. He has more than 25 years experience of writing, editing, sub-editing, teaching and broadcasting in Australia and overseas. After a degree and graduate work in zoology, including several years overseas, he trained and worked as a journalist at The Age. He has since written and subedited for newspapers, newsletters and magazines both nationally and internationally. He has also worked for universities, government departments, research institutes, private companies and professional organisations producing background material, writing press releases, editing publications, and organising publicity. He is a foundation member of Australian Science Communicators, and a member of the executive committee which organises two national competitions for researchers and inventors, Fresh Science and Fresh Innovators. Tim Thwaites is the science columnist for Eureka Street, the voice of New Scientist in Australia, and teaches non-fiction writing at La Trobe University.

**Merlin Crossley**

Professor in Biochemistry, University of Sydney  
 Director of Research, College of Sciences and Technology  
 Tel: (02) 9351 2233  
 Email: [m.crossley@mmb.usyd.edu.au](mailto:m.crossley@mmb.usyd.edu.au)  
 Web page: [www.mmb.usyd.edu.au/research.php?person=crosslem](http://www.mmb.usyd.edu.au/research.php?person=crosslem)



Merlin graduated from the University of Melbourne with a BSc Hons having majored in Microbiology and Genetics. After receiving a Rhodes Scholarship he moved to Oxford University for his doctorate studied and worked on gene regulation in the liver. He then took a post-doctoral position at Harvard Medical School and investigated genetic diseases of the blood. He returned to a position at the University of Sydney in 1995 and has continued his work on blood diseases.

**John Mattick**

Professor of Molecular Biology and Australian Research Council Federation Fellow at the Institute for Molecular Bioscience at the University of Queensland  
 Tel: (07) 3346 2110  
 Email: [j.greder@imb.uq.edu.au](mailto:j.greder@imb.uq.edu.au)  
 Web page: [www.imb.uq.edu.au/?page=12238&pid=](http://www.imb.uq.edu.au/?page=12238&pid=)



John was the founding Director of the ARC Special Research Centre for Molecular and Cellular Biology, the ARC Special Research Centre for Functional and Applied Genomics, the Australian Genome Research Facility, and the Institute for Molecular Bioscience (see <http://www.imb.uq.edu.au>), which has spun off a number of biotechnology companies via its commercialisation company IMBcom. He was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia in 2001, and awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia in 2002 as well as the Australian Government Centenary Medal in 2003. He is a member of the Council of Scientists of the Human Frontier Science Program and was the organizer of the 1999 Human Genome Meeting. He has also participated in and chaired a number of reviews for Genome Canada. He has published widely in molecular biology, genomics and bioinformatics, with particular focus on the role of the noncoding (so-called “junk”) DNA in complex organisms, including articles in *Science*, *Nature Reviews Genetics*, *Genome Research*, *Human Molecular Genetics* and *Scientific American*.