ABACBS Annual Report 2018

Date: 20th November, 2018

Executive committee:

President: Tony Papenfuss
Vice-President: Aaron Darling
Treasurer: Annette McGrath
Secretary: Joshua Ho (resigned August, 2018) & Ashley Waardenberg (appointed)
Postdoctoral Representative: Alan Rubin
Student Representative: Leah Roberts
Professional Bioinformatician Representative: Roxane Legaie
Ordinary members: Nicola Armstrong & Alicia Oshlack

Society executive committee

In August, our Secretary Joshua Ho resigned from the ABACBS executive committee in order to take up a position at the University of Hong Kong.

Joshua held the role of Secretary since 2016, and has worked closely with the entire committee to look after the administrative aspects of the Society, including reporting to the Consumer Affair Victoria, maintaining the Society’s insurance, and coordinating with various ABACBS local events. Joshua also led the writing of a submission to one of the NHMRC’s consultations.

The executive committee would like to thank Joshua for his hard work during his tenure as secretary. Joshua remains an active member of ABACBS, and will continue to contribute to the organisation of GIW/ABACBS 2019, which will be held in Sydney.

We are very fortunate that former Vice President Ashley Waardenberg returned to Australia and agreed to be appointed to the role of Secretary when it was vacated by Joshua’s departure. Ashley’s experience with the Society helped make the transition of the Secretary role seamless and he has been highly active while in the role for the last few months.
Society membership

The current membership breakdown is (as at 20 November 2018):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full members</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student members</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life members</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate members</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total membership</strong></td>
<td><strong>831</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thanks to all members for their support, enthusiasm, and involvement across the year.

In FY2018, the net income after Stripe fees from membership was $14,345.12.

Diversity policy and implementation

ABACBS established a strong diversity policy in its first year of operation and ahead of its first conference in Sydney. The policy requires exact gender balance amongst each type of invited speaker at conferences (and other events), and exact balance on all event organising committees. It also aims for balance of various forms of diversity across other areas of the conference. The society has continued to strive to improve all forms of diversity in society activities.

This year the conference organisers maintained a diversity report on the conference here: [https://www.abacbs.org/conference2018/diversity-report/](https://www.abacbs.org/conference2018/diversity-report/). This included live updates of different aspects of diversity on submitted abstracts.

An open source abstract submission system was developed to support collection of useful diversity information from delegates submitting abstracts including career-stage, geographic location, and gender identity. The system also supported blinded peer review of abstracts. This was hosted on a free AWS instance. Members of the National
Program Committee provided general favorable feedback on the software. The code is available here: https://github.com/daniaki/ABACBSAbsSS.

ABACBS Constitution

At the 2017 AGM, 3 special resolutions were passed to improve the society's constitution and align it better with how the executive committee and members would like to see it run. This introduced several permanent positions representing different communities: ECRs, Students and Professionals, as well as two ordinary member positions. This also created the role of Past-president on the executive committee, which would be filled automatically by the previous president if they agree or if they decline, by nomination of any previous president and a resolution. The role has equal voting rights on the committee. The purpose of the role is to improve continuity of governance and help to support the new incoming president.

Website

Our website www.abacbs.org continues to be actively maintained and has been substantially developed in the last 12 months. It hosts information on society events, and provides society documents and policies. Our jobs board has been very active with >75 jobs posted in the last 12 months.

Annual conference and regional event EOI system

The ABACBS executive selects sites to run the annual conference 2-3 years ahead of time. Our conferences have or will run in:

- Sydney (2015)
- Brisbane (2016)
- Adelaide (2017)
- Melbourne (2018)
- Sydney (2019) This will be a joint international conference.

A system for submitting expressions of interest to run future annual conferences, regional or other events has been established here: https://www.abacbs.org/events/eoi-to-host-an-abacbs-event.

Expressions of interest are currently being considered for the 2020 annual conference and beyond. An EOI will trigger follow up conversations with the executive committee.
Sponsorship

We applied for and received sponsorship from the NSW Dept. of Industry to hold the annual SBRS conference (see details in “Sydney” below).

From 2014-2017, the society received generous sponsorship from EMBL Australia to support us while we became established ($20,000pa) and in turn to sponsor Bioinfosummer ($13,000pa) and the UQ Winter School ($13,000pa) has now ended.

External engagement

In the last 12 months, ABACBS has made submissions to two National Health and Medical Research Council consultations (one led by Joshua Ho and one led by Tony Papenfuss) and a Medical Research Future Fund consultation (led by Tony Papenfuss and members Bernie Pope and Nick Wong).

President Tony Papenfuss represented ABACBS at GIW-2017 (28th International Conference on Genome Informatics) in South Korea and attended the Association of Asian Societies for Bioinformatics board meeting, where ABACBS was awarded hosting rights for GIW in 2019 in Sydney.

Secretary Joshua Ho represented ABACBS at the International Society for Computational Biology’s (ISCB) regional affiliated group meeting at Chicago during ISMB 2018. As our Society has been established for more than two years, we are now recognised as a full member affiliate group. This affiliation in ISCB ensures that ABACBS is fully connected to the international bioinformatics community.

President Tony Papenfuss represented ABACBS on the EMBL-ABR International Scientific Advisory Group.

ABACBS has joint affiliate membership with the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute providing an opportunity for input and involvement in AMSI programs. ABACBS has also been a strong supporter of AMSI’s Bioinfosummer with executive members Nicola Armstrong, Alicia Oshlack and Tony Papenfuss being members of the Bioinfosummer Standing Committee. Nicola Armstrong is organising the 2018 Bioinfosummer in Perth.
Awards and honours

In 2017, ABACBS established its first society career award--the Honorary Senior Fellow. The Honorary Senior Fellow awards include life membership of ABACBS. The first awardees were Professor Sue Wilson and Professor Terry Speed.

In 2018, ABACBS rolled out the second phase of its awards program, designed to recognise and promote excellence across the Australian bioinformatics community. These now span almost all career stages, as well as recognising other aspects of excellence in bioinformatics. The new awards were: (1) outstanding contribution by an Early Career Researcher, (2) the Mid-Career Research Award, (3) the Open Source and Open Science award, and (4) the Professional Bioinformatician award. Previous Honorary Senior Fellows awardees are asked to serve on the ABACBS Awards Committee to select awardees.

The society will commence the third and final phase of awards which will comprise student awards for outstanding PhD theses in 2019.

Rolling out a system of awards to recognize outstanding Australian bioinformaticians and computational biologists has been a long term aim of the ABACBS executive since its establishment. The rolling out of awards over the last 2 years has been overseen by Aaron Darling.

Society events

ABACBS-2017 Conference report

The ABACBS Annual Conference held in Adelaide and was a major highlight of 2017. The meeting was attended by 197 delegates. A total of 215 people attended the conference or satellite workshops. Invited speakers were Des Higgins, Su-In Lee, Karin Verspoor, Joseph Powell, Gavin Huttley, and Melanie Bahlo. The conference was followed by two days of workshops.
Regional events

Sydney

The 2018 Sydney Bioinformatics Research Symposium (SBRS) was held at the University of Technology Sydney on 15 June 2018. It was a free one-day event. This event attracted a record number of 192 registered participants. Among all the participants, ~50% were students (undergraduates, masters and PhD students), and ~21% were postdoctoral fellows, suggesting this conference is largely attended by young trainees. We received 64 abstracts – a record number of abstract submissions since this annual symposium began in 2011. Among all the abstracts, 8 people were selected to give a short (10 mins) oral presentations, 18 were selected to give fast forward (2 mins) oral presentations, and 44 people were offered to give poster presentations. The symposium also featured 4 outstanding invited speakers: Kim-Anh Do (MD Anderson Cancer Center, USA), Allen Rodrigo (ANU), Joseph Powell (Garvan), and Kitty Lo (Sydney). We offered four awards for five outstanding presenters in the symposium, and they were all students: Andrian Yang and Johanna Wong (both awarded for the best student presentation), Vivien Yeung (best oral presentation), Madeleine Otway (best fast forward presentation), and Kevin Wang (best poster presentation). We thank all the sponsors for making this event possible, especially the NSW Department of Industry, through the Office of Chief Scientist and Engineer. SBRS will not be held in 2018 since Sydney is the host location for the joint International Conference on Genome Informatics (GIW) and ABACBS Conference.

Special Interest Groups

Students

In the past year COMBINE (the student sub-committee of ABACBS) has run 13 workshops and events in six cities with over 300 attendees. These events include networking events where students present some of their work followed by an opportunity to meet other people in the field, social events associated with conference and workshops covering a general introduction to programming as well as specialised bioinformatics topics. Our annual flagship event is a National Student Symposium associated with the Australian Bioinformatics and Computational Biology Society conference which was held in Adelaide in November 2017. This was highly successful with students given an opportunity to present and discuss their work in a formal setting.
For the first time in 2018 we also ran a national survey to better understand the Australian computational biology student community.

Professional Bioinformatics

Since the creation of a seat on the committee to represent professional bioinformaticians at the AGM in Nov 2017, the community has connected through a few events (a social dinner in Adelaide and a get-together lunch in Melbourne). Those informal meetings gave the professional bioinformatics community of Australia an opportunity to get to know each other, to raise their concerns around funding opportunities (often unsuitable since based on academic career expectations), and to express their desire for dedicated travel awards and professional development opportunities.

The Professional Bioinformatics mailing list now has 50 subscribers, from most states and territories of Australia (VIC/SA/ACT/QLD/NSW). As the awareness around the prof community increases, we expect to reach more subscribers, covering the remaining states (WA/TAS).

In addition to this, a dedicated Professional Bioinformatician Award will be given at the ABACBS conference this year, to recognise the hard work and talent from the non-academic bioinformatics community, which often remains unseen due to the lack of publication opportunities.

Finally, the biggest achievement from the Professional Bioinformatics representation this year, is the organisation of the very first Symposium dedicated to Clinical Applications of Bioinformatics in Australia to date! The half day event will host a series of short talks from the community, a keynote speaker (Karin Kassahn, Head of Technology Advancement at SA Pathology) and a panel discussion with senior professional bioinformaticians (from VIC/NSW/SA) to discuss career opportunities and challenges around the non-academic path.

This event will conclude the first year of official representation of the professional bioinformatics community in Australia, and will be a fantastic launch into the new year. We look forward to more exchange and more engagement with the community.