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A brief history of the Australasian Neuroscience Society

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ABSTRACT

The collective efforts of Australasian neuroscientists over the past 50 years to forge a binational presence are reviewed in this article. The events in the 1970s leading to the formation of an informal Australian Neurosciences Society are discussed in the context of the international emergence of neuroscience as an interdisciplinary science. Thereafter, the establishment in 1980 of the Australian Neuroscience Society, subsequently renamed as the Australasian Neuroscience Society (ANS), is described. The achievements of ANS—including its active role in developing national, regional, and global cooperation to promote neuroscience—are chronicled over successive decades, followed by a discussion of the future challenges facing the society and its associated neuroscience institutions.

KEYWORDS

Australasian Neuroscience Society; Australia; history; New Zealand

Introduction

The history of neuroscience in Australia and New Zealand spans some 120 years. It ranges from the early pioneers, isolated from their peers and relying on sea-borne communications and library resources, to its current status involving thousands of researchers in university departments, research institutes, and centers in real-time communication with their peers and the world literature.

As neuroscience began to flourish as a discipline worldwide in the 1960s, several Australasian laboratories developed international reputations and emerged from their separate discipline bases to form institutes, centers, and other platforms for the propagation of neuroscience as a discipline in its own right. These were briefly surveyed by Geffen (1982) and Redman (1992), but there is as yet no comprehensive review of their achievements.

These developments catalyzed the formation of an informal Australian Neurosciences Society in the 1970s, which in turn led to the establishment in 1980 of a formal society, the Australian Neuroscience Society, subsequently renamed as the Australasian Neuroscience Society (ANS). This review focuses on the collective efforts of Australasian neuroscientists

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over the past 50 years to forge a binational presence through ANS, whose mission is to be "the peak body for Neuroscience in Australia and New Zealand and to be seen as the leading regional body on an international level."

The informal Australian Neurosciences Society

In the 1970s, as awareness of the advantages of interdisciplinary research grew, an informal Australian Neurosciences Society emerged, led by Lawrie Austin and David Curtis, and began to meet annually without a constitution, office bearers, or membership. Its first meeting, held at Monash University in Melbourne in 1972, was devoted to synaptic plasticity during development. Proceedings took the form of a roundtable at which participants were enjoined not to present details of their original research. Slides were banned, and the only visual aid provided was a blackboard. This format meant that participants still had to rely on their discipline-based societies of anatomy, biochemistry, physiology, pathology, and others for presentation of their research.

A debate soon arose on whether to establish a formal neuroscience society. This was resisted by those who felt the Australian neuroscience community was too small and too dispersed to warrant forming an interdisciplinary society that would compete inevitably with the established discipline-based societies for membership and attendance. Indeed, one founder of the informal society argued, "I hope we can keep our group small enough so that everyone can hear every session—surely this is essential for a multidisciplinary approach" (Curtis 1971).

Establishment of the formal Australian Neuroscience Society

The initiative to establish a formal society came from the Center for Neuroscience at the Flinders University of South Australia, which had been formed in 1977 as the first interdisciplinary neuroscience center in Australia (Geffen 1980). The catalyst at Flinders was the absence of separate academic departments in the new medical school that was fully integrated with the hospital located on campus. The obvious benefits of interdisciplinary frameworks that were also being developed at other institutions provided a strong impetus for formation of a national society.

When the informal Australian Neurosciences Society held its annual meeting at Flinders in 1978, a lively discussion occurred about the merits of forming a formal interdisciplinary neuroscience society. Subsequently, at a conference on neurotoxins held at the Flinders Center for Neuroscience in 1979, the initiative to establish such a society gained further traction from the presence of several international participants who were engaged in similar discussions in their own countries. Shortly thereafter, a survey was undertaken of Australian and New Zealand neuroscientists, who voted overwhelmingly in favor of establishing a formal society. At a meeting in Canberra in February 1980, it was therefore decided to establish the ANS.

The 1980s

Meetings of the Australian Neuroscience Society

The inaugural meeting of the Australian Neuroscience Society was convened at Flinders University in January 1981, attended by more than 200 scientists from 15 disciplines, including neurophysiology, neuropharmacology, neuroanatomy, neurochemistry, behavioral science, clinical neurosciences, neuroendocrinology, neuropathology, biophysics, and other related fields.

At that meeting, a constitution was adopted and office bearers were elected. The president together with the national secretary and the treasurer constituted the executive and a council was formed comprising the executive, an editor, and representatives from each Australian state and New Zealand.

The initial purpose of the society was to convene and run an annual conference where scientists and clinicians active in research on the nervous system could present and discuss their work. The program of plenary lectures, symposia, and free communications (oral and poster) aimed to ensure representation from all relevant disciplines. Early career awards named in honor of Australia's first neurologist, Alfred Walter Campbell, and the neuroanatomist Sir Grafton Elliot Smith were established in 1987. The organization of the conference was run by a local committee from the host institution that included the national secretary and editor. The editor reviewed and corrected all the abstracts, which were published initially as supplements to *Neuroscience Letters* (1982–1989), and then as the *Proceedings of the Australian Neuroscience Society* (1990–2008). Since then, they have been distributed electronically.

During the 1980s, a primary aim was to increase the membership of the society. The success of the annual conferences over this decade was a major factor in ensuring this happened, with membership numbers increasing from 77 in 1981 to 356 in 1989. This was helped by including membership fees for all meeting registrants.

Establishment of national and international scientific links

During the 1980s, the society was successful in gaining funding from the Australian Academy of Science for several Boden conferences, which were highly competitive, small, specialist conferences in the biological sciences funded by Alexander Boden, an academy fellow, manufacturing chemist, and philanthropist who wrote several successful science text books for schools. The topics of the two Boden neuroscience conferences held in the 1980s were chemical transmitters in the nervous system (1984) and processing of information in the auditory and tactile systems (1989), reflecting fields in which Australasian neuroscientists were particularly active. Many ANS members, and latterly international neuroscientists, have also attended the Australasian Winter Conference on Brain Research, held annually in Queenstown, New Zealand, since 1983.

To promote national interdisciplinary activities during the 1980s, ANS meetings were held in conjunction with meetings of the ANZ Society of Cell Biology (now the ANZ Society of Cell and Developmental Biology), the Australian Physiological and Pharmacological Society (APPS; now the Australian Physiological Society), and the Australian Anatomical Society.

Links were established with the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS), now called Science & Technology Australia, to lobby parliament for improvements in funding, and the society participated in the bicentennial meeting of the Australian Societies for Experimental Biology that was held in Canberra in 1988. Arising from that meeting and from public concern about the use of animals in research, a Committee of Australian Biomedical Societies on Animal Experimentation was established, on which ANS was represented.

ANS joined the International Brain Research Organization (IBRO) in 1982, the ANS president becoming a member of the governing council. In 1984, Laurie Geffen represented ANS at the inaugural meeting of the reformed IBRO Council in Oxford, where the European founders of the "old" IBRO contended with the American representatives of the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) about governance of the "new" IBRO, with little attention to other constituencies. At the next governing council (in Budapest in 1987), Elspeth McLachlan was told, after having argued for more representation from outside the European/North America axis in the Congress program, that she should not be upset, as they planned to have a woman speaker at the next Congress. Those were the days!

The 1990s

In the 1990s, ANS made deliberate efforts to increase its outreach both within Australia and internationally. Recognizing the growing importance of engagement with the community, politicians, and government regarding neuroscience research, ANS established at its annual conference a special plenary lecture, named for FASTS, to which the general public was invited without having to register for the conference.

ANS also sought to build relationships and stimulate interactions between basic and clinical researchers. The first outcome of this initiative was a partnership between ANS and the Neurosurgical Society of Australasia to establish the Eccles Plenary Lecture, recognizing Australia's Nobel Prize winner, which is delivered at the annual meetings of each society by a basic and a clinical neuroscientist in alternate years. Another positive move was the publication of a quarterly newsletter, first by mail and then electronically, from 2013. As the size of the annual meetings grew, the work of the local organizing committees was lightened from 1993 by the appointment of professional conference organizers to move ANS conferences from university campuses to convention centers. In that year, correction of the abstracts by the editor was abandoned, and their content and appearance became the responsibility of the authors. Since these early days, the number of international attendees at ANS conferences has increased substantially.

Participation in regional activities

In 1991, ANS staged two conferences in partnership with other societies. The first was held at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, in conjunction with APPS, the Anatomical Society of Australia and New Zealand, and the Physiological Society of New Zealand (PSNZ). This choice of location was indicative of the strong links between neuroscientists in Australia and New Zealand, which had been present since the inception of ANS.

The other joint conference in 1991 took place in Sydney, where ANS hosted the 13th Biennial Meeting of the International Society for Neurochemistry (ISN). During this meeting, agreement was reached to establish the Asian Pacific Society for Neurochemistry (APSN), a regional grouping in which Australasian neurochemists have continued to be involved. ISN and APSN have benefited from the involvement of several ANS members on their councils, including Lawrie Austin on the first council and ISN Presidents Peter Dunkley (2001–2003), Phil Beart (2011–2013), and Lindy Rae (from 2023). The inaugural president of APSN was Graham Johnston (1992–1994), and ANS members Peter Dodd (1998–2002) and Andy Lawrence (2014–2015) also became presidents.

ANS also played key roles in establishing both the Pan-Asian Oceanic Commission for Neuroscience in the early 1990s and the Federation of Asian and Oceanian Neuroscience Societies (FAONS). The Pan Asian Commission only lasted briefly, but FAONS, which was started before IBRO rectified its neglect of this region by setting up its own IBRO Asian-Pacific Regional Committee (APRC), has persisted. Elspeth McLachlan, a former ANS president, was president of FAONS in 1997–1999 and chaired the local organizing committee for the combined Congress of the Federation of Asian-Pacific Physiological Societies/ FAONS/ APPS/ PSNZ held in Brisbane in 1998, at which ANS supported the attendance of three early career Asian neuroscientists. Paul Pilowsky ran the website of the FAONS for many years and was its secretary from 2006 to 2008, and Sarah Dunlop was president of FAONS in 2011–2013.

As in the 1980s, ANS continued its Boden Conference collaboration with the Australian Academy of Science, and once again the titles reveal areas of local strength: Regulatory Peptides (1990), Innervation of Blood Vessels (1991), Muscle Afferents and Motor Control (1993), Retinal Biology and Retinal Diseases (1997), and Synaptic Transmission (1998).

Support for young researchers

In 1992, Glaxo donated $5,000 *per annum* for student travel awards to attend the annual ANS conference. The 1990s also saw a growth in funding for postdoctoral research positions in Australia. Young Australian researchers who had moved overseas to pursue their postdoctoral training were looking for opportunities to return to Australia. Also, there was increasing interest among international early career researchers to undertake postdoctoral training in Australasia. ANS therefore established a booth manned by ANS members at the annual North American Society for Neuroscience (SfN) meetings, where information about research opportunities available in Australasian neuroscience was available. This initiative has continued and grown to include social functions during SfN conferences, where neuroscientists from other countries can interact informally with those from Australasia.

Having created several awards to recognize excellence among young neuroscientists, ANS decided to recognize excellence among its more senior members by establishing the ANS Distinguished Achievement Award for contributions to Neuroscience and the Society, and by awarding honorary life membership to those who have rendered long and notable service to the society.

The 2000s

The 2000s saw significant changes to the society, all fueled by substantial growth in the membership. A hallmark of the growth was the inclusion of different disciplines, including neuropsychology, brain imaging, and computational and molecular neuroscience, as each of these fields began to burgeon.

The structure of the annual meetings changed in the early 2000s to include an overseas speaker in each symposium, with travel support provided. A second important change was in the status of the poster sessions, which had been considered as less prestigious than oral presentations. It was recognized that with the right programming, poster sessions work exceptionally well in allowing frank discussions between those directly active in the field.

The overseas/international plenary lecture series initiated in 1991 brought many distinguished visitors, including the Nobel Laureates Stanley Prusiner (1993), Bert Sakmann (1998), Eric Kandel (2004), and Peter Agre (2007).

Interactions with international neuroscience societies

As the society continued to grow nationally, it also gained a wider presence by holding joint meetings with other national, regional, and international neuroscience societies, such as the joint meeting held in Sydney with the International Society of Developmental Neuroscience (ISDN) in 2002.

The largest and most significant joint meeting during this decade was the Seventh World Congress of IBRO in Melbourne, hosted by ANS in 2007 (Figure 1). The responsibility of balancing expectations with finances fell upon George Paxinos as the chair of the local organizing committee and on Glenda Halliday as ANS president. The congress was a resounding success, with a diverse program including plenary lecturers Peter Agre (United States), Norio Akaike (Japan), Mandyam Srinivasan (Australia), Lily Jan (USA), Herta Flor (Germany), Edvard Moser (Norway), Mu Ming Poo (China/United States), and Simon Gandevia (Australia), and attendance by more than 2,500 registrants.

Capitalizing on the success of this meeting, the society provided substantial support for collaborations between ANS and the Asia-Pacific Regional Committee (APRC) of IBRO. The first was the IBRO-ANS Advanced Neuroscience School on Neuroethology, which was held before the congress. ANS sent lecturers to the IBRO Associate Schools of Neuroscience run in several countries around the Asia-Pacific region from 2004. These schools, designed for students from several adjacent countries to attend lectures and tutorial sessions and set up networks for the future, have burgeoned in recent years.

Major ANS contributors to IBRO were Steve Redman as its treasurer (2003–2010); Elspeth McLachlan as first chair of APRC (1999–2001), regional coordinator (2004–2007), and chair of the Public Education Committee (2008–2010); and Glenda Halliday as APRC secretary (2008–2016). In 2008, the first ANS medallion was awarded to Y. S. Chan from Hong Kong, a stalwart of APRC, first as secretary and then as president (Figure 2).

Figure 1. At the Seventh World Congress of IBRO hosted by ANS in Melbourne in 2007: (left to right) Albert Aguayo (IBRO president), George Paxinos (chair, local organizing committee), Glenda Halliday (ANS president), Peter Agre (Nobel Laureate, plenary speaker), Elspeth McLachlan (chair, International Planning Committee), and Fred Mendelsohn (former ANS president).

Figure 2. The ANS Distinguished Achievement Award Medallion created by sculptor Michael Meszaros, symbolizing the chain of connections between the brain, the organism, and the outside world.

Australian and New Zealand Brain Bee challenges

The International Brain Bee competition founded in 1998 in the United States has inspired thousands of high school students to study and pursue careers in neuroscience. Linda Richards initiated the Australian Brain Bee Challenge (ABBC) in 2006 and was its first national coordinator (2007–2014), followed by Vaughan Macefield (2015–2016), and Ramesh Rajan since 2017. The competition spread throughout Australia and New Zealand, and joint national finals were held at the IBRO Congress in Melbourne in 2007, the first ever national finals held anywhere in the world (Figure 3).

Louise Nicholson started the New Zealand Brain Bee Challenge (NZBBC) in 2007 and was its national coordinator until 2012, after which it was taken over first by Maurice Curtis in 2012 and then Debbie Young in 2017. Collaboration between Australia and New Zealand coordinators has allowed for a similar competition style, rules, and questions to be maintained. These Brain Bees have provided further opportunity to engage internationally, as the winners from the Australian and New Zealand National finals then compete in the International Brain Bee.

Australian Course in Advanced Neuroscience (ACAN)

The year 2005 marked the commencement of the Australian Course in Advanced Neuroscience (ACAN), held at the University of Queensland Research Station on North Stradbroke Island, off the Queensland coast, with the Queensland Brain Institute providing infrastructure and in-kind support. Under the guidance of Steve Redman, the inaugural director, and of his successors John Bekkers, Stephen Williams, and Chris Reid, this annual course provides three weeks of intensive training in modern cellular electrophysiology, especially patch-clamping, and imaging for 12 Australasian doctoral and postdoctoral trainees. ACAN lecturers come from around the world, adding to the experience. This course now includes *in vivo* methods and multi-photon microscopy (Figure 4).

Although not formally a part of ANS when it started, ACAN was a product of many contributions from ANS members and from sponsoring universities and institutes. In 2009, ACAN passed into the ownership of ANS, supported by a magnificent additional gift of $500,000 from the Alan and Elizabeth Finkel Foundation. After 15 successful years, the 2020 and 2021 ACAN workshops had to be canceled because of pandemic restrictions; they will resume at a new site at the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health in Melbourne when those restrictions permit.

The 2010s

At a meeting of ANS held in Auckland in 2011, the need for a change in name to reflect the close and collegial partnership between Australian and New Zealand neuroscientists in the society was highlighted. Consequently, at the 2012 meeting,

Figure 3. The Australian Brain Bee Challenge: (top) finalists at the 2019 event; (middle) ANS President Linda Richards (left) with finalists at the 2018 event; (bottom) Jennifer Rodger (pictured left) and Charles Watson (pictured right) with finalists at the 2017 event.

the society's constitution was changed with unanimous approval to formally include New Zealand. However, a name change for the society was not as straightforward! The proposed change of name to the Neuroscience Society of Australia and New Zealand passed by a small majority but did not achieve the two-thirds majority

Figure 4. The Australian Course in Advanced Neuroscience (ACAN) held at the University of Queensland Research Station on North Stradbroke Island, off the Queensland coast: (clockwise, from top left) signing of the agreement between ANS, ACAN Ltd., and The A & E Finkel Foundation by Elizabeth Finkel, Alan Finkel, David Vaney, Ann Turnley, and Stephen Redman (2009); John Bekkers (past course director) with Theresa Puthussery and two other students; Chris Reid (current director), Stephen Williams (past director) and students; Stephen Redman (past director) and student.

required to change the constitution. Other options were then canvased through an online forum, and the name Australasian Neuroscience Society was eventually adopted by the required majority.[1,2]

ANS members faced a significant challenge in 2015, when a private bill was introduced in the Australian Senate to prohibit the importation of live nonhuman primates for the purposes of research. The ANS public submission included letters of support from the SfN and the European Animal Research Association. During the inquiry, it became evident that a significant long-term goal of the proponents of the bill was to ban all animal research. Although the bill was not passed, it was a wake-up call to Australian medical researchers not to take public support of their research for granted. ANS subsequently established a committee for animals in research to provide advocacy and education on why research using animals is so critical for medical and scientific advancement.

[1].Charles de Brosses coined the term *Australasia* (as French *Australasie*) in *Histoire des navigations aux terres australes* (1756), derived from the Latin for "south of Asia" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australasia, searched 3.08.2021).

[2].In Australia, the term *Australasia* is taken to include Australia, New Zealand, and the neighboring islands of the Pacific. In New Zealand, it is generally taken to mean just Australia and New Zealand. It is with this latter meaning that the term is used in the title of ANS.

Successful meetings continued to be held throughout the 2010s, with more than 1,100 registrants at the 2013 Melbourne meeting, the highest number of participants ever. The 2017 conference in Sydney was notable for increased engagement by ANS student members, including an image competition, professional writing workshops, and a "speed mentoring" event. This meeting also had the first symposium devoted to the issue of animals in research and a president's symposium hosting the global leaders of the International Brain Initiative.

In 2017, new committees were set up, including an Equity and Diversity Committee. A new plenary lecture was also established recognizing Elspeth McLachlan, the first female president of the society. A new logo, in the stylized shape of a brain composed of neuronal networks, replaced the original logo, which had depicted the letters ANS dominating the entire Southern Hemisphere!

International activities

ANS has supported its members at all career stages to participate fully in international meetings: for example, financial support for students and early career researchers to attend Cajal Courses in Europe. There are now multiple chapters of the SfN within Australia and New Zealand, and each year there is an event called Neuroscience Down Under at the SfN meeting in the United States, sponsored in part by ANS, that not only facilitates the return of expatriates but also assists overseas neuroscientists to come to Australasia.

In 2012, ANS delegates, sponsored by the Australian and Israeli governments, participated in the Israeli Society for Neuroscience meeting in Eilat, subsequently renamed as the Binational Australian-Israeli Neuroscience Conference. Designed to build new scientific links, the conference aligned with an Australian government delegation to Israel, led by Minister for Mental Health and Aging Mark Butler. The Australian neuroscience group was led by Alan Finkel, the Australian chief scientist from 2016 to 2020, and included many scientific institutions and companies.

A joint meeting of ANS with the ISN and the APSN in Cairns in 2015 was chaired by John Rostas. The timing of this meeting meant that the next annual conference of ANS was delayed almost three years. This decoupling of membership fees from conference registration, together with ISN's decision to offer free membership of ISN as a cheap path to registration for the Cairns meeting, produced a major financial blow to the society. Nevertheless, the Cairns meeting was highly successful, with more than 1,200 registrants, almost half from Australia and New Zealand. The conference was also notable for hosting the International Brain Bee, at which talented young neuroscience enthusiasts from 23 countries competed. This included a thrilling final, and the winner by half a point was from Australia! Australian and New Zealand students have won the International Brain Bee competition three times since 2006: Teresa Tang in 2012, Jackson Huang in 2013, and Jade Pham in 2015.

ANS has established reciprocal arrangements with the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS), the Japanese Neuroscience Society (JNS), and the Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN). FAONS has continued to hold annual conferences and was involved in the organization of the Tenth IBRO World Congress in

Daegu, South Korea, in 2019. One of the most significant outcomes of ANS outreach has been that it encouraged many societies in the Asia-Pacific region to become active and start up the networking opportunities they currently enjoy.

Australian Brain Alliance and International Brain Initiative

In 2016, it became evident that Australia needed to develop a national research initiative akin to the major brain initiative projects under way in the United States, Europe, and Japan. At the same time, these initiatives and others around the world came together to form an international alliance. The Australian Brain Alliance (ABA) was formed through the efforts of the National Committee for Brain and Mind of the Australian Academy of Science in partnership with ANS, with Linda Richards leading ANS involvement. Neuroscientists from across Australia worked to create a proposed Australian national research initiative, which was published alongside those of other nations in the journal *Neuron* in 2016 (see Australian Brain Alliance Steering Committee 2016). At Rockefeller University in New York, existing and emerging brain initiatives presented their national plans and leaders presented the case for a more concerted global effort to understand the brain at a meeting at the United Nations.

At a satellite ANS meeting in Canberra in 2017, a declaration to form the International Brain Initiative (IBI) was signed at the Australian Academy of Sciences. As a founding member of the IBI, the ABA continues to advocate for neuroscience funding. Work continues in the areas of neuro-ethics (Australian Brain Alliance 2019), data standards and sharing, tools and technology development, education and training, and so on. By uniting research programs, funders, and stakeholders, the IBI plays a role distinct from IBRO, which remains an essential partner in supporting neuroscience worldwide.

The 2020s and beyond

ANS has accomplished much in its first 40 years, led by a succession of 20 presidents (Figure 5). But what does the future hold? The crystal ball suddenly became cloudy with the Covid-19 pandemic onset in 2020, which has wreaked havoc on neuroscience in many regions around the world. Australia and New Zealand have been no exception. Lockdowns in both countries meant the canceling in 2020 and 2021 of the ANS annual conference. One outcome of this has been a decline in membership—not surprising, given that membership is strongly linked to conference attendance. Thus, as many societies, ANS has had to tighten its financial belt and work to find other ways of engaging with its membership (Figure 5).

Most notably, ANS established a popular webinar series, taking advantage of the symposia planned for the 2020 conference. This style was also used for an abbreviated, one-day version of the 2020 annual conference that will be used again in 2021. The Early-Mid Career Researcher Committee and Student Body Committee have also grasped the opportunity to organize their own webinars and a three-minute thesis competition, respectively.

Of course, the pandemic will eventually pass; meanwhile, ANS is functioning as much as possible online. Importantly, ANS will continue its engagement with the wider international community through its membership in both IBRO and FAONS and through reciprocal agreements with FENS, SfN, JNS, and CAN, complemented by the involvement of ANS members in

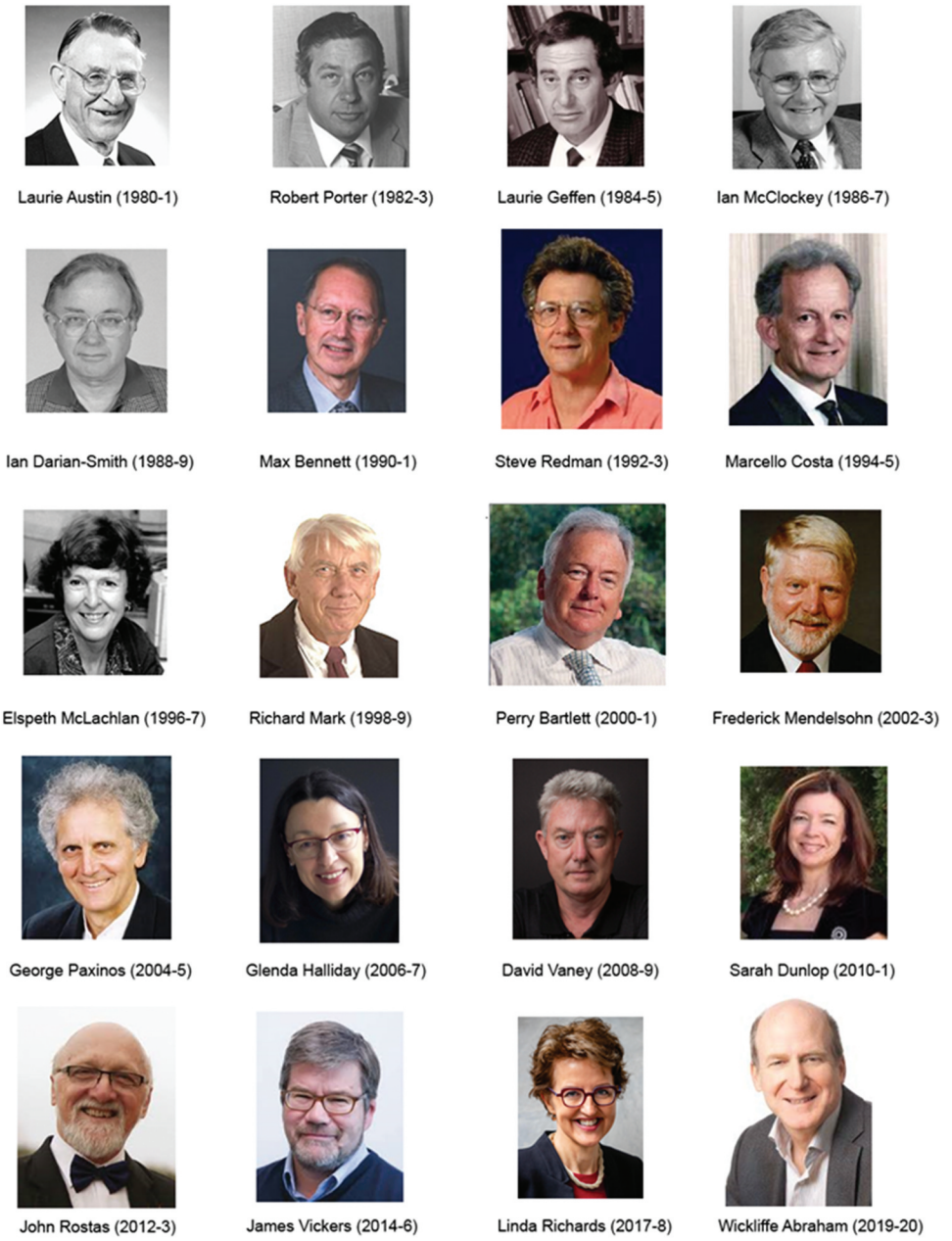

Figure 5. Presidents of the Australasian Neuroscience Society 1980–2020, elected from across Australia and New Zealand: Lawrie Austin, Monash University; Robert Porter, Monash University; Laurie Geffen, Flinders University; Ian McCloskey, University of New South Wales; Ian Darian-Smith, University of Melbourne; Max Bennett, University of Sydney; Steve Redman, Australian National University; Marcello Costa, Flinders University; Elspeth McLachlan, University of New South Wales; Richard Mark, Australian National University; Perry Bartlett, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, Melbourne; Fred Mendelsohn, University of Melbourne; George Paxinos, University of New South Wales; Glenda Halliday, University of New South Wales; David Vaney, University of Queensland; John Rostas, University of Newcastle; James Vickers, University of Tasmania; Linda Richards, University of Queensland; and Wickliffe Abraham, University of Otago. Photos have been reproduced with permission from the Australian Academy of Science for Porter, Bennett, Redman, Costa, McLachlan, Mark, Bartlett, Mendelsohn, and Paxinos; Monash University for Austin; University of Melbourne for Darian-Smith; and Neuroscience Research Australia for McCloskey and Halliday. All other photos are reproduced with personal permission.

the IBI (see International Brain Initiative 2020). Given the geographic isolation of Australia and New Zealand and the current uncertainties of international travel, maintaining these links is vital for the continued growth of strong, collaborative research with our international colleagues.

Although neuroscience is an interdisciplinary field of endeavor, the tensions that surrounded the creation of the society some 50 years ago still exist today, albeit in a different form. The initial fear that the strength and impact of the traditional, discipline-based societies would be reduced has not been fully realized, but now ANS itself sees the development and growth of neuroscience in subdiscipline-based societies as a potential drain on its membership and attendance at its conference. Keeping links with these new and in some cases preexisting, mainly clinical societies is a challenge yet to be fully addressed.

Despite the current travails, Australasian neuroscience has a bright future. The future will shine even brighter if the ABA is successful in generating a new funding pipeline for research, targeting the creation of advanced industries in neuro-technology, developing treatments for debilitating brain disorders, and producing high-impact transdisciplinary collaborations that will increase understanding of the brain.

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