THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The Australian Science Media Centre (AusSMC) turned 11 this past year and has become our nation’s science press gallery. With over 1,400 journalists signed up alongside 4,700 expert scientists, the AusSMC drives the evidence-based science news agenda in Australia’s media every day.

The AusSMC is the only independent, national, not-for-profit organisation that provides the media with direct access to evidence-based science and expertise on a large scale. It is not an arm of the government, business, science or education sectors. It is a public good outfit funded by a wide range of organisations who believe in the need for the unique evidence-based science content that the AusSMC generates for the Australian media.

Special thanks go to our long list of supporters, hard-working staff and board, whose unwavering support has ensured a bumper year for the Centre, at a time when the demand for accurate, evidence-based, timely science and expertise is as strong as ever.

Our breaking science news portal, Scimex, continues to be refined and improved. Much of the year was spent working on a major upgrade of Scimex, which has since gone live with a new-look home page, story pages and an increased focus on multimedia, with thanks to the Australian Government’s Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. The site continues to build its momentum with journalists and is now receiving almost 30,000 page views each month.

A raft of other projects kept us busy during the year, including the Indigenous media mentoring program which got underway in the second half of 2016, and closer ties with China were forged through a grant with the Australia-China Council.

This year the Centre held 25 media briefings and generated 82 sets of expert reactions on topics as diverse as Cyclone Debbie, the world’s biggest battery, Cassini’s visit to Saturn, HIV and childhood asthma.

As the Centre approaches its 12th birthday, we are busy on many fronts as the media world continues to evolve. Media training is now a major activity of the centre. During the year, the Centre ran both physical training sessions and our first online event for around 80 scientists and media officers with a session on video and visuals. Watch this space as we work towards a stronger focus on multimedia and video content into the future.

Peter Yates AM  Lyndal Byford
Chair  Acting CEO
BY THE NUMBERS

- Over 4,700 Australian experts on the SMC database
- 676 enquiries received from the media
- Over 13,300 media clips tracked to SMC output (excluding SMC Picks and Scimex)
- 3,193 stories published on Scimex
- 25 media briefings presented to journalists (involving 71 experts)
- 82 sets of expert comments distributed to journalists (involving 415 expert comments)
- Over 467 new experts added in 2016-17
- 1,440 active journalists registered with the SMC
- 3,193 stories published on Scimex
- 3,193 stories published on Scimex
- 82 sets of expert comments distributed to journalists
- 7,800 Twitter followers (as of 30 June 2017)
- 1,597 Facebook ‘likes’
- 342,934 Scimex page views
- 92,903 Scimex users
- 467 new experts added in 2016-17
- 353 new journalist registrations
- 467 new experts added in 2016-17
- 353 new journalist registrations
LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

SCIMEX IMPROVEMENTS

The last 12 months have seen a significant upgrade to our flagship science news portal, Scimex.org.

Over 1,400 journalists actively used the site during the year, while a general audience of 92,000 users viewed almost 350,000 pages. Encouragingly, the average session duration is above 4 minutes amongst journalists, well above the industry average and an indicator of high engagement.

With the financial support of the Australian Government’s Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, a raft of improvements including a redesign of the home page, new look story pages and a stronger focus on multimedia were commissioned as part of Scimex “Phase 2”.

Research organisations can now also track the media outlets that view their stories and view Altmetrics, providing a visual breakdown of an article’s digital impact and reach.

Scimex Daily - an automated email that goes out to journalists each day - was successfully launched in the second half of 2016 and has proved very popular.

This round of improvements has been rolled out progressively from early 2017 and is due to be completed by the end of 2017.

SUPPORT FOR THE CENTRE

Support for the Centre continued to grow as we gained two new Foundation Sponsors during the year, the Australian National University and the University of Tasmania.

Our group of supporting Affiliates also expanded with Western Sydney University, Murdoch University, the Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC, The Menzies School of Health Research and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) joining as affiliates.
INDIGENOUS MEDIA MENTORING PROGRAM

The Indigenous media mentoring pilot program was supported with a grant from the National Australia Bank (NAB) and was launched in Sydney on 31 August 2016. As part of the project, 11 Indigenous researchers undertook three intensive days of training in Sydney in September 2016, including a day at NITV, a division of SBS.

Seven of the experts then undertook placements with major media outlets including the ABC, The Guardian, The Conversation and Fairfax.

Off the back of our pilot program in 2016, the AusSMC has been given an Inspiring Australia grant to run a similar program during National Science Week in August 2017.

Feedback from the participants has been very positive. Perhaps the most important longer term objective of a program like this is to nurture more indigenous “science heroes” in the mainstream media. Having Indigenous researchers more visible and engaged in debate and discussion about Indigenous and non-Indigenous issues is a benefit to all of us.

MULTIMEDIA STRATEGY

A renewed focus on video and multimedia led to the commissioning of a report from former Channel Ten news head, Grant Heading, to assess the current needs of newsrooms for visual material, the capacity of the university sector to create it and the role the AusSMC could play as facilitator.

Several recommendations have been actioned during the year that included training for scientists and media teams in smart phone video production. We see this as an important first step towards increasing video and image content on Scimex.

We ran three video training sessions with our Foundation partner universities, including an online event attended by 80 scientists and media officers and with more in the pipeline. Watch this space as we roll out more initiatives in the ever-changing digital space.
AUSTRALIA-CHINA COUNCIL GRANT

The AusSMC was successful in gaining a grant from the Australia-China Council to develop a collaborative relationship with the developing Chinese Science Media Centre. Activities included reciprocal meetings between the Chinese SMC and the Australian SMC to share information, protocols and procedures.

Joe Milton and Lyndal Byford visited Beijing in March 2017, which included visiting local media outlets (eg: Xinhua News Agency and the China Science Daily) and meeting the company behind WeChat, China’s most important social media channel with 846 million users.

Five members of the developing Chinese SMC and its governing organisation, CRISP, visited the AusSMC for two days in April 2017.

There is strong government support for science communication in China and we look forward to a growing relationship with this important region.

SCIENCE MEDIA CENTRES MEETING IN GERMANY

In September 2016, Susannah Eliott and Lyndal Byford attended a meeting of all existing and developing SMCs hosted by the new German SMC in Cologne. It was an opportunity for the active UK, Australian, NZ and German SMCs to get together and share experiences and information.

SCIENCE ADVISORS MEETING - BRUSSELS, SEPTEMBER 2016

Also in September 2016, Susannah Eliott from the AusSMC attended the 2nd International Network for Government Science Advice Conference in Brussels, Belgium, along with Peter Griffin from the NZ SMC.

The event was well attended by science advisers from around the world, including Australia’s Chief Scientist and AusSMC patron, Dr Alan Finkel.

It was a great opportunity to find out what the most pressing issues are globally and to make advisers more aware of the growing SMC network.
IVF, sex selection and surrogacy – April 2017

The NHMRC approached the AusSMC to help launch their latest review of the ethical guidelines around IVF, including the use of sex selection for non-medical reasons.

Despite the committee’s majority view that there ‘may be some circumstances where there is no ethical barrier to the use of sex selection’, the guidelines maintained the current ban.

The AusSMC hosted a briefing to launch the guidelines but also sought independent experts’ comments on the decision, some of whom disagreed with the NHMRC’s ban. Journalists from The Guardian, AAP, News Corp and Fairfax tuned in to the briefing, generating almost 200 news stories.

Snowy hydro 2.0 – March 2017

In March, just days after the SA Government released its electricity plan, the Federal Government announced its own intervention in the electricity debate with a $2bn expansion of the Snowy Mountains hydro scheme.

The AusSMC gathered expert comments, which addressed both the likely impacts on the national electricity grid and the water resources in the area affected.

The reaction generated 520 media hits, including Sky News, ABC Radio and SBS.

Does diagnosis of less severe autism in children explain the ‘epidemic’? – Jan 2017

Rates of autism diagnosis have increased 20-fold over the last 30 years, raising questions as to whether more children are being born with autism, or if diagnosis is just becoming more common.

We held a briefing to explain a Telethon Kids Institute study which suggested the so-called ‘autism epidemic’ is in fact just a case of increased awareness and better diagnosis of people with milder autism, rather than a true growth in the condition.

The briefing generated 447 news stories, with journalists from outlets including AAP and the Sydney Morning Herald tuning in.
Oldest evidence of Aboriginal Australians in the outback – November 2016

The discovery of a rock shelter in South Australia’s Flinders Ranges revealed that Aboriginal Australians settled the arid outback 10,000 years earlier than previously thought - around 49,000 years ago.

The finding also pushes back the dates of the oldest bone and stone tools and the earliest-known use of ochre in Australia.

An AusSMC briefing with the experts who led the project generated 1,256 media hits, with 664 of these from overseas outlets including CNN and the BBC.

Tassie devils beating cancer by evolving rapidly – August 2016

Researchers from Griffith University discovered that Tasmanian Devils are evolving resistance to the aggressive Devil Facial Tumour Disease. The results suggested that Tassie devils have evolved to resist the disease in just four to six generations.

We collected expert comments to help break down the findings for journalists. The comments generated 397 media hits, including New Scientist, The Herald Sun, ABC and Australian Geographic.

Robot babies increase pregnancy rates in teens – August 2016

In August 2016, landmark research from the Telethon Kids Institute found that electronic baby dolls, designed to simulate the ‘real experience’ of having an infant, don’t work to cut teen pregnancy rates. The research revealed that teenage girls who used the dolls were in fact more likely to become pregnant.

One of the study authors took part in a media briefing to explain the surprising results, generating 1,217 media hits, including features on Seven News, Channel Nine and Ten.

Juno’s Jupiter jaunt – July 2016

NASA reported that the spacecraft Juno had entered orbit around Jupiter, and would be settling in for the long haul to collect data from our Solar System’s biggest planet.

The AusSMC gathered comments from local experts and their reaction were picked up in 199 news stories, including ABC News 24, Radio National and The Age.
Staff numbers were relatively stable. While Nigel Kerby was away on a 12 month voluntary placement in Indonesia, Kylie Stonard did a great job taking on project management of Scimex phase 2.

We were sad to lose Melanie Bagg who moved to Canberra in April 2017 to take up the role of Director of Communications at the Australian Academy of Science. It’s a fantastic opportunity for Melanie and we wish her all the best. In early 2017, Annie Robinson joined the team in Supporter Relations.

Staff at the Centre during the year were:

- Dr Susannah Eliott, CEO
- Lyndal Byford, Media Manager
- Dr Joseph Milton, Senior Media Officer
- Nigel Kerby, Project Manager (on leave)
- Kylie Stonard, Project Manager
- Dr Melanie Bagg, Business Development and Partnerships Manager
- Marilyn Arnold, Office Manager
- Meg Duggan, Support Officer
- Ben Kaldi, Science Information Officer
- Anna Kosmylnina, Media Officer
- Emily Erickson, Project Assistant
- Annie Robinson, Supporter Relations

AusSMC STAFF OUT AND ABOUT

Staff were regularly in demand to discuss interesting science stories in the media.

Susannah Eliott and Joe Milton continued their involvement with the Research Filter segment on ABC RN Drive, hosted by Patricia Karvelas. Melanie also held regular ‘medical science myth busting’ slots on ABC Adelaide Mornings. All three were also regular guests on 2CC radio in Canberra.

ABC RN Drive Research Filter interviews can be found at www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive.

In other outreach, Joe Milton ran a three-hour workshop at The Walkley Foundation’s Storyology in August 2016 titled ‘How to spot shit science.’ The presentation explored the alarm bells journalists should listen out for when they’re reporting on science issues. Lyndal Byford also gave a talk on our ‘Scientist in Residence’ program at the same event.

In February 2017, Susannah Eliott and Melanie Bagg presented at the Australian Science Communicators National Conference and in March, Susannah Eliott was a panelist at the annual Science Meets Parliament event in Canberra.
LIST OF MEDIA BRIEFINGS AND EXPERT REACTIONS

The following is a full list of the media briefings (blue) and expert reactions the Science Media Centre organised over the past year. Collectively they generated over 13,000 media hits in Australia and overseas.

JUNE 2017
- Field tests show insecticide impact on bees
- We have three years to fix the climate
- Caffeinated critters: buzzed mice lose weight
- 2016 Census data released
- Murray-Darling Basin plan will fail - Wentworth report
- UNESCO report - Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Coral Reefs
- Paracetamol in pregnancy and male sexual development
- Finkel Report - Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market
- Ancient skulls show we humans are 100,000 years older than we thought
- Donald Trump pulls the US out of the Paris climate agreement

MAY 2017
- A wet and wheezy winter
- Changes to NHMRC funding announced
- Move over DNA, sugars are a new frontier to attack cancer
- Statins may not be worth it for older people
- Prozac during pregnancy linked to birth defects
- Wannacry malware holds the world to ransom
- National research infrastructure roadmap released
- Federal Budget 2017-18
- Painkillers a heart risk from the start

APRIL 2017
- ‘Evolution-bending’ gene drives could conquer pests, but what are the risks?
- Cassini spacecraft’s grand Saturn finale
- Is popular belief that saturated fats clog up arteries ‘plain wrong’?
- Aussies to March for Science
- IVF, sex selection and surrogacy: Release of the NHMRC Ethical guidelines on the use of assisted reproductive technology
- Touchscreens for toddlers are stifling sleep
- Syrian chemical attack

MAR 2017
- “World’s biggest” battery and solar farm to be built in SA’s Riverland
- Very low frequency electromagnetic field exposure linked to motor neurone disease
- Trump signs order to remove Obama’s climate change policies
- Tropical Cyclone Debbie
- New Aussie malaria vaccine succeeds in tests on humans, including the Professor behind it
- National Science Statement released
- Snowy hydro 2.0
- Getting your head around the Aussie electricity debate
- Diabetes drug may treat fatal brain disease
- South Australia’s energy plan
- Hair sample DNA reveals Aboriginal arrival, spread, and stay
- Does pesticide exposure during pregnancy affect kids’ behaviour later?
WHO releases list of most dangerous superbugs
Medical marijuana sale approved
Five killed in Melbourne plane crash
Clinical trial of once-promising Alzheimer’s drug stopped
‘Clean coal’ - light at the end of the tunnel or pipe dream?
Adelaide earthquake
South eastern Australia swelters through a heatwave
Black Saturday and Barrier Reef bleaching - what’s to blame and what’s next?
Ban on nicotine e-cigarettes to remain

More extreme weather and blackouts in SA
Does diagnosis of less severe autism in children explain the ‘epidemic’?
Excess Alzheimer’s protein hurts brain’s GPS
2016 confirmed as hottest year on record*
Arthur Sinodinos announced as new Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science
Kids given alcohol by their parents more likely to drink, but less likely to binge
Different protein clumps for different ‘types’ of Alzheimer’s

Food poisoning spike in Victoria
Aceh earthquake causes deaths
AusSMC top ten science stories
Poo, power and pot-roasts: Australia’s big nitrogen footprint

Scorchers, cyclones, skin cancer, sharks and salmonella a sneak peek at this summer
Donald Trump plans to scrap climate science research at NASA
Large clinical trial of promising Alzheimer’s drug fails
New Zealand and Japanese earthquakes and tsunami
Strong earthquake in NZ triggers tsunami
Global carbon emissions growth stalls for third consecutive year
Kirby STI / HIV stats
Australia ratifies Paris climate agreement
2013’s angry summer may be our new ‘normal’ by 2035 - can COP22 save us?
Paris Climate Change Agreement comes into force
Oldest evidence of Aboriginal Australians in the outback
ABC TV announces new Catalyst format
Connecting Australia to the journey to Mars
Vitamin D deficiency linked to childhood asthma

BOM and CSIRO release State of the Climate 2016
Aussie scientist builds world first VR anatomy tool for the Oculus Rift
Choosing Wisely: The medical tests, treatments and procedures Australia should rethink
Pollies link SA’s blackouts to renewable energy
First baby born using “3 person IVF” to treat mitochondrial disease
Is the end in sight for hepatitis C in Australia?
Smarter cities make healthier people
The UN brings the battle to superbugs
DNA shows Aboriginal Australians’ origins
August 2016 - Another record-breaking scorcher
Health effects of water fluoridation - NHMRC draft information paper release
Future heat-waves a threat to Australian plant life
Cholesterol lowering medication harms hyped
Trends in Aussie drug use - ecstasy’s back, heroin overdoses and mental illness guidelines
Aussies to probe warped space-time with new gravitational waves research centre
Climate Change Authority scientists label Authority report “untrue and dangerous”

Tassie devils beating cancer by evolving rapidly
Magnitude 6.8 ‘quake hits central Myanmar
Magnitude 6.2 ‘quake hits central Italy
Robot babies increase pregnancy rates in teens
Pioneering infertility treatment less invasive, cheaper than IVF
Paracetamol in pregnancy linked to behavioural problems in kids
Rio experts
New vaccine for strep throat and rheumatic fever to enter human trials

Dolly clones celebrate their baa-rthday and are ageing well
Man-made bacteria self-destruct to fight cancer
Antarctic Peninsula warming grinds to a halt
Terror attack in Nice, France
Biodiversity drops to ‘unsafe levels’ on more than half of the world’s land
Obesity second only to smoking in causing early death
AIDS epidemic over in Australia
Warming seas killing our kelp forests, permanently
Juno’s Jupiter jaunt
Ozone hole is healing

Professor Andrew Grulich from the Kirby Institute explains that AIDS in Australia has been virtually eliminated.

ABC News, July 2016
The AusSMC Board, chaired by Peter Yates AM, meets four times a year. Deputy chairs are Robyn Williams from the ABC and Professor Merlin Crossley from UNSW. Board members at 30 June 2017 were:

Peter Yates AM (Chair)
Chair, RiAus and Chair,
Faculty of Business and Economics, The University of Melbourne

Robyn Williams (Deputy Chair)
The Science Show, ABC

Professor Merlin Crossley (Deputy Chair)
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education),
The University of NSW

Jim Carroll
Director of News, Current Affairs & Sport, SBS

John Croll
CEO, iSentia

Professor Karen Day
Dean of Science, University of Melbourne

Professor Graham Durant
Director, Questacon - The National Science and Technology Centre

Harry Efthimiou
Chief Health Insurance Officer, AIA Australia

Dr Michael Ellies
Media consultant

Brad Hatch
Manager of Communications, Fairfax Media

Professor Judith Smith
Dean, Faculty of Science, UTS

Professor Peter Rathjen
Vice-Chancellor, University of Tasmania

Dr Paul Willis
Director, RiAus

Melvin Mansell
State Editorial Director, SA, WA, NT & Tas,
News Corp Australia

Jemimah Pentland
Head of Communications
Asia Pacific,
CSL Limited

Fiona McLeod
External Affairs Manager,
Australia Pacific LNG

Professor Iain Watson
Deputy Vice Chancellor (External Engagement),
The University of Queensland

Huw Morgan
Manager, Media Liaison
CSIRO

Professor Mary O’Kane
NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer

Gordon Radford
Executive Partner,
Johnson Winter & Slattery

Professor Robert Saint
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Flinders University

Dr Amanda Caples
Lead Scientist, Victorian Govt

The Hon Jay Weatherill
Premier,
Govt of South Australia

Dr Kiaran Kirk
Dean, ANU College of Science, The Australian National University

**PATRONS**

Dr Alan Finkel AO
Australia’s Chief Scientist (National)

Baroness Professor Susan Greenfield CBE
University of Oxford (International)
SPONSORS AND AFFILIATES
All support is capped at 10% of the AusSMC’s budget to maintain the Centre’s independence. The AusSMC is grateful to the following supporters during 2016-17.
### INCOME

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<td>Affiliation funds</td>
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