



**THE
ROYAL SOCIETY
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

ENRICHING LIVES THROUGH KNOWLEDGE SINCE 1821

1295TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

WEDNESDAY 7 JULY 2021 AT 6.30PM

By ZOOM Webinar

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85254308699>

AGENDA

- 1. WELCOME** – President, Dr Susan Pond AM FRSN
- 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country**
- 1.2 Diversity and Inclusion statement**
- 1.3 Minutes of the 1294th Ordinary General Meeting held on 2 June 2021**

2. CONFIRMATION OF MEMBERSHIP

As no valid objection was lodged within two weeks following the 1293rd Ordinary General Meeting, the election of the following new Members took effect from the date of that meeting held on 5 May 2021.

2.1 Members

Professor Shane Timothy Ahyong
Ms Julia Andrews
Professor Debbie Haski-Leventhal
Pastor Donna-Maree Jensen
Dr Jonathan Knott
Mr Antony Seymour

2 ANNOUNCEMENT OF NAMES OF CANDIDATES FOR FELLOWSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP

If no valid objection is lodged within two weeks of this Ordinary General Meeting, that is, by 6.30pm on 21 July 2021, the election of the following new Fellows and Members will take effect from the date of this meeting.

3.1 Fellows

Professor Roger William Byard
Professor Adelle Coster
Associate Professor Lena Joel Danaia
Professor Judith Margaret Dawes
Mr Jeremy Robin Eccles
Professor Susan Lesley Forster
Professor Geoffrey M. Gurr
Mr Yves Pol Hernot
Dr Carolyn Jane Hogg
Professor Annamarie Ruston Jagose
Associate Professor Morgan Joel Luck
Professor Francesco Marino
Professor Sharynne McLeod
Professor Seumas Roderick Miller
Dr John Gruffydd Luther Morris
Professor Mark Daniel Morrison
Emeritus Professor Donald Harold Napper
Professor Chiara Neto
Dr Ian James Oppermann
Dr Paul David Prenzler
Emeritus Professor Lesley Joy Rogers
Professor Pauline Mary Ross
Mr Robert Francis Ryan
Professor Jason John Sharples
Professor Glenda Anna Sluga
Ms Georgina Amanda Spilsbury
Dr Danny KY Wong

3.2 Members

Mr Stephen Berry Austin
Mr Robert Chadwick
Mr Bradley Spencer Hammond

4 REPORT FROM COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL

The President will provide a verbal report on matters emanating from the Council and its committees.

5 QUESTIONS

Questions can be sent to the President in advance, to president@royalsoc.org.au

6 THIS EVENING'S PRESENTATION

SOCIETY AS AN INFORMATION PROCESSING SYSTEM, AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

Dr Erik Aslaksen FRSN, physicist, engineer, and author

Dr Aslaksen has over fifty years of industrial experience, gained in the USA, Switzerland, and Australia, covering fields as diverse as microwave components, power electronics, quantum electronics, and telecommunications, and ranging from basic research to corporate management. He was a Director of Ewbank Preece Sinclair Knight from 1988 until 1993, a Principal of Sinclair Knight Merz from 1993 until 2003, and an Adjunct Professor at the UTS until 1995.

More recently, his main interest has been in the area of systems engineering, engineering management, philosophical aspects of engineering, and the interaction between technology and society, as well as the evolution of society. As well as being a Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW and of the International Council on Systems Engineering, he is a Charter Member of Omega Alpha. He is the author of eight books (one with W.R. Belcher), four book chapters, and more than eighty papers.

We are concerned about our environment, and rightfully so: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and threats to this environment from global warming, loss of biological diversity, and many other concerns. These are all concerns about our physical environment, much as an ice bear is concerned about the melting of the ice, or as the koala is concerned about the reduction of its habitat due to deforestation. We are also concerned about many aspects of our society, such as overpopulation, economic growth, inequality, poverty, healthcare, and pandemics; again, concerns about physical features.

The evening's presentation will present a complementary view of society — one peculiar to our species; a view of society as an information-processing system in which the physical aspects of society are both the results and the enablers of our mental processes. The system consists of individuals as processors and of the interactions between them in the form of information exchange, and as the processing capability and capacity of the individuals have not changed significantly over the last 10,000 years or so, the evolution of our society is, in this view, the evolution of this information exchange. This is an evolution characterised by the media involved and of the technology enabling them, from the earliest cave art to the Internet. Correspondingly, our concerns for society change from the above concerns about physical features to concerns about the information exchange and the associated information technology — in particular, about the ability to use the technology to control the information flow. Two examples of this concern will be discussed; one being the increasing concentration of wealth in the West, and with it the ownership and control of the media by a small group of people; the other arising out of the fact that the world society has arrived at a unique point in its evolution, but with a great reluctance to talk about it.

7 VOTE OF THANKS

8 CLOSE – President, Dr Susan Pond AM FRSN