



THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

ENRICHING LIVES THROUGH KNOWLEDGE SINCE 1821

Minutes of the 1295th Ordinary General Meeting of The Royal Society of New South Wales held by ZOOM Webinar on Wednesday 7 July 2021 at 6.30PM.

There were 55 Members, Fellows and guests in attendance.

1. WELCOME

The President, Dr Susan Pond AM FRSN presided at the meeting. She welcomed members and guests and gave an acknowledgement of country. She also referred to the Society's Diversity and Inclusion Policy and asked that members consider nominating female candidates and those from diverse backgrounds for membership of the Society.

1.1 Minutes of the 1294th Ordinary General Meeting held on 2 June 2021

The Minutes of the previous Ordinary General Meeting, previously circulated, were approved.

2 CONFIRMATION OF MEMBERSHIP

As no valid objection was lodged within two weeks following the 1294th Ordinary General Meeting, the election of the following new Members took effect from the date of that meeting held on 2 June 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

3 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

Dr Pond advised that the opening of the Society's exhibition NEXUS at the State Library of NSW had been delayed due to the State Government health regulations which necessitated the closure of the State Library. The exhibition would be opened as soon as restrictions were lifted. She encouraged members to visit.

5 QUESTIONS

There were no questions sent to the President prior to the meeting.

6 THE 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. His experience ranges 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 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. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW and of the International Council on Systems Engineering and is a Charter Member of Omega Alpha. He is the author of eight books, four book chapters, and more than eighty papers.

The presentation presented 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 were 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.

There followed a question and answer session moderated by Emeritus Professor Christina Slade, Chair of the Events Committee.

7 VOTE OF THANKS

The vote of thanks was given by Emeritus Professor Christina Slade.

8 CLOSE

Dr Pond thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 7.37pm