

Editorial

In the last edition, I referred to the announcement by the Australian Research Council that it intended to withdraw the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Ranked Outlets Indicator and to introduce a new system that does not use prescriptive ranks. It is pleasing that the *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW* is included in the new ERA 2012 Journal List. It is expected that this change will make multidisciplinary journals such as the Society's Journal and Proceedings more attractive to authors whose work extends beyond a specific discipline.

To this end, we are most fortunate to publish in this edition a paper by Lord May of Oxford on the role of scientific advice in influencing public policy. This subject is of particular importance given the extraordinarily complex and important challenges that the world faces in the 21st century regarding climate change, providing food for a population of over 7 billion people, and the challenges facing the world's financial system. Lord May's paper is particularly apposite in light of the Society's determination to play a larger part in the intellectual life of NSW through attracting papers that recognise the influence of art, literature and philosophy on the practice of science and, particularly, the way in which science influences art, literature and philosophy.

Complementing Lord May's subject is a paper by Professors John Boldeman and Richard Banati, two distinguished scientists at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), proposing the construction of a high-performance accelerator for radiation therapy and research and a paper by Justin Gilligan and Nick Otway at the NSW Department of Primary Industries in developing

a means for identifying sharks species as part of managing the threat due to escalating shark fin demand. A paper by Patrick Michael explains important research done to improve the productivity of sweet potato, a dietary staple throughout much of the Pacific, and other tropical countries.

We are also most fortunate to have a biographical paper by Ragbir Bhathal, a former president of the Society, on the extraordinary career of Brian Schmidt, Australia's most recent Nobel laureate.

The Society's Council met recently to plan events for 2012. The programme will be announced early in the new year and will reflect the broader interest but continuing to emphasis the importance of science as central to the discourse. I am reminded of the Rede Lecture, *The two cultures*, delivered by C.P. Snow in 1959 (Snow (1959)). Snow lamented the gulf that had emerged between the sciences and the humanities to the extent that the two actually find difficulty in communicating with each another. Since then, if anything, the situation has got worse: well-reasoned scientific argument is rejected by non-scientists with very little rational justification; and many scientists struggle to find the relevance of non-scientific activities to the practice of their discipline. Perhaps, the Royal Society of NSW can provide a forum to bridge that gulf.

Snow, Charles P. (1959) *The two cultures*, (3rd edn., 1993), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK

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