

Chapter Two

Growth and professionalisation: towards a national, professional and scientific society

Immediately after its establishment, the Australian Society for Microbiology began to thrive. The founders of the ASM had been correct in their assessment of the need for the Society. By the second decade of its existence, membership numbers had swelled to over 1200. The services it provided for members had also diversified as the Society consolidated and became a strong voice of microbiology in Australia. Not only did the number of members grow, but the Scientific Meetings became more frequent and attracted international speakers, the committees on which the ASM was asked to be represented became more numerous, and the activities in which the Society was involved continued to grow. The needs of members also began to change. It soon became clear that the structure of the ASM needed be addressed so that the Society could adapt to the changing roles it was being called upon to play.

Immediate growth

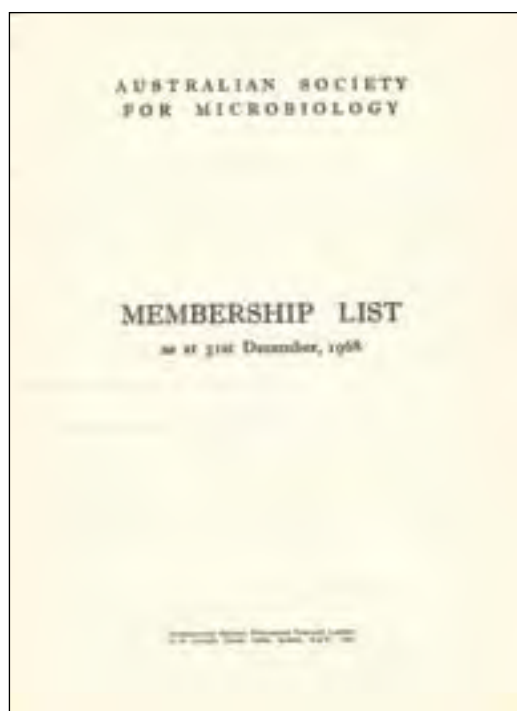
When the original proposal to establish a society dedicated to the science of microbiology was mooted, the name that was first suggested was the Australian Society for Microbiologists. The emphasis was on the people – the practitioners and scientists who would make up the society. By the time the Constitution was adopted and the organisation came to life, there had been a subtle shift in semantics. The proposed name was altered to the Australian Society for Microbiology. However, despite this slight change of name, the focus remained firmly on the new Society's members.

In 1958, Nancy Atkinson, one of the prime movers in the creation of the ASM, identified 158 South Australian science graduates who had studied microbiology. After surveying these graduates she was 'struck by the varied fields and varied conditions in which they were working'.¹ Based on the results of her survey, she argued persuasively for the establishment of a society:

Microbiology in Australia could be greatly strengthened and improved by the formation of a professional association ... I know of no existing professional body to which the science graduate in microbiology can adhere to give him professional status.²

While the ASM was ultimately established as a learned rather than a professional society, Atkinson and those who toiled with her to establish the ASM, were accurate in their assessment of need. In her first annual report as Honorary Treasurer of the newly formed Society, Atkinson declared a membership of 103. By the following year, membership had more than tripled to reach 365.³ The numbers made it resoundingly clear that microbiologists in Australia needed their new Society.

Initially, the membership structure was simple. All interested in microbiology were eligible to join and membership levels were divided into categories based on levels of activity. In addition to individual membership, sustaining membership could be granted to organisations 'interested in the aims and objectives of the Society'.⁴ In essence, sustaining membership was a form of sponsorship. Interested organisations made a financial contribution in the form of a subscription fee to the ASM in return for which they received certain benefits.



The Society's membership grew rapidly from 103 in 1960 to 365 the following year and continued to rise, demonstrating the clear need for the new society.



Conference accommodation has come a long way from this rudimentary tent shared by Val Asche and Nancy Millis during an Annual Scientific Meeting in Canberra.
Courtesy Val Asche.



This newspaper clipping gives details of the 1979 Annual Scientific Meeting in Adelaide, including the Rubbo Orator, the annual dinner and a trip to the Barossa Valley for wine tasting.
Courtesy Val Asche.

In the early years of the Society, sustaining members included Monsanto Chemicals, CSIRO, Carlton & United Breweries, Chelmer Diagnostic Laboratories, and Colonial Sugar Refining Co Ltd, just to name a few. By the end of the 1970s, sustaining members – which by then were entitled to free exhibition space at the Annual

Annual Scientific Meetings – the highlight of the year

Without question, the highlight of the ASM calendar each year is the Annual Scientific Meeting held over five days on a rotating state basis. These meetings come from humble beginnings and have evolved over the past 50 years into the showcase of Australian microbiology that they are today.

The original ASM Constitution stated that Annual General Meetings would be held, where possible, in conjunction with the meetings of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS).⁶ The primary aim of ANZAAS was for cross-fertilisation among the various disciplines and it made sense for the fledgling Society to link its meetings with the already established body. However, as the Society

grew, greater specialisation was needed, and by the start of the 1970s ASM had resolved to hold its own meetings.

For many years ASM Scientific Meetings were held back-to-back with meetings of the Australian Biochemical Society (ABS, now the ASBMB), which rotated between major cities. As many ASM members at this time were also ABS members, this allowed them to attend both meetings, as well as offering some efficiencies of scale such as joint overseas speakers. But ASM membership continued to grow, as did its strength as an independent society, and gradually ASM meetings began to overshadow those of its associate.

Soon the ASM Annual Meeting was established firmly as ‘the’ meeting to

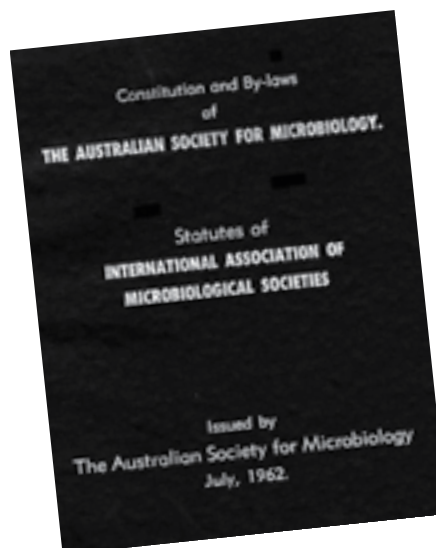
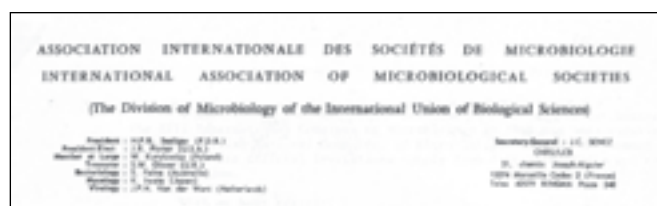
attend. Microbiologists around the country made it a priority. Illustrating the importance placed on attending ASM meetings is the story of the CSIRO boss who, due to funding cuts, could offer either full support for two staff to attend or partial support for all eight. The vote was unanimous – no-one wanted to miss out.⁷ By the mid 1970s, Annual Meetings were a powerful event, having evolved from a group of learned people meeting for a couple of days to a five-day long program. The success of these meetings was a driving force behind the Society’s incorporation. According to John Pitt, ‘those were the two things that really drove ASM from being a little learned society to the force that it became and still is’.⁸

Scientific Meetings as part of their membership – had expanded to include companies such as Bacto Laboratories and the publishers Springer Verlag and Academic Press.⁵ As the diversity and calibre of sustaining members highlights, the ASM was held in increasingly high regard, growing in reputation and strength.

By 1975, a record number of 250 members attended the Annual Scientific Meeting. It was just four years after the Scientific Meeting had become an annual event and was the first of such gatherings to be held in Perth. The yearly meeting had clearly become a well-established part of the ASM calendar and, as attendance figures suggest, highly valued by members. But the Annual Scientific Meeting was not the sole focus of the Society. The ASM performed many different roles and functions, all of which were of benefit to its members, both directly and indirectly.

Building a learned society and sense of community

The creation of the Australian Society for Microbiology formalised a community – a community of scientists linked by the discipline of microbiology. While gathering each year at Annual Meetings was an important expression of community, members needed more. Aware of this, the Constitution made provision for the state branches to be as autonomous as possible. Their committee structure, fee schedule, and activities were relatively unencumbered by Federal Council involvement. However, the ASM, committed to being a society for



Linking Australian microbiologists with the international scientific community was an important aim of the ASM and membership of the International Association of Microbiological Societies (IAMS, now IUMS) was the first step in realising this objective.

Rubbo Oration

An important tradition at ASM meetings, the annual Rubbo Oration was introduced in 1970 to commemorate the Society's second President, Sydney Dattilo Rubbo. After his untimely death the previous year, colleagues and friends in academia, industry, medicine and in artistic and cultural circles wanted to provide a lasting but living memorial.⁹ Funds were raised and a trust was established at the University of Melbourne which was used to endow the Rubbo Oration given at each Annual Scientific Meeting of the Society.

The Rubbo Orator is selected by the trust, alternating each year between a leading Australian microbiologist and an international speaker. Being asked to give the Rubbo Oration is considered an honour. The address and the dinner that follows have become a high point of the Annual Meeting – 'the Rubbo Oration is the special night, you rather dress up', notes Val Asche.¹⁰ The Rubbo Oration is fundamental to the Society and, in the nearly 40 years since it was introduced, it has become an essential part of Annual Meetings. In this way, the man for which it was named is genuinely honoured. As Dick Groot Obbink explains, 'I think that if there was a saint in the Society, then Syd Rubbo gets that nomination'.¹¹



The inaugural Rubbo Oration, delivered by Macfarlane Burnet in 1970, was widely heralded as a success. Courtesy Val Asche.



A selection of the Society's eminent Rubbo Orators over the years – Macfarlane Burnet (1970), Ian Gust (1988), Gustav Nossal (1978), Frank Fenner (1973), Frank Gibson (1975), Arnold Demain (1979), Holger Jannasch (1990), Nancy Millis (1982), Carleton Gajdusek (1992), Peter Doherty (1998) and Cedric Mims (2001).
 Courtesy John Curtin School of Medical Research, The Australian National University, Ian Gust and Frank Fenner.



microbiologists throughout Australia, sought to provide services to its members across the country that would enhance the state-based activities. One of the ways it could do this was by coordinating specific activities that helped foster a sense of community, and build a learned society.

The creation of a learned society for microbiology was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the ASM. Linking Australian microbiologists with the international scientific community was critical. Membership of the International Association of Microbiological Societies (IAMS) was the first step in realising this aim, and was achieved almost immediately. The ASM began to send delegates to international congresses and provided representatives to the various IAMS discipline-based subgroups. In addition, international experts were invited to Australia by the ASM to deliver keynote addresses at Scientific Meetings. By 1970 this became formalised by the Rubbo Oration and the Visiting Lecturer Scheme.

The invitation of international scientists to deliver the Rubbo Oration ensured the presence of an international speaker at Scientific Meetings at least every alternate year. In the early days of the Society, this was an important way the ASM facilitated a connection between Australian microbiologists and the international community. It exposed members to cutting-edge research that would hopefully inspire discussion and debate – both critical elements of a learned society.¹³ The fact that the visiting speaker would, where possible, travel to the state branches in addition to delivering the Rubbo Oration further assisted in the building of an Australia-wide learned society.

Perhaps as a result of the success of the Rubbo Oration and the international visitors it attracted, the ASM was eager to support other visiting lecturers from overseas. In 1974, the ASM was approached by the Society for General Microbiology, based in the United Kingdom, and the British Council to participate in a scheme that would see a British microbiologist come to Australia and deliver a lecture at each of the state branches. It would be a travelling road show of sorts, and the ASM was asked to contribute to the costs of travel. The branches were in favour of the proposal and Mark Richmond visited Australia later that year.¹⁴ His visit and tour of the country was deemed so successful that it was agreed that, if possible, the scheme should be repeated.

Recognising the value of these visits to members Australia-wide and with an aim of maintaining the ASM's commitment to being a learned society, the Federal Council investigated ways and means of funding the scheme. A small subcommittee was organised to approach pharmaceutical companies for sponsorship and at the same time, nominations for overseas speakers were requested from the branches via the national newsletter. In 1976, thanks to funding assistance from CSIRO and the Australian Meat Board, John Norris, who had a special interest in single cell protein, meat microbiology and insecticides visited Australia. Another Australia-wide lecture circuit was undertaken soon after by animal virologist Fred Brown under the auspices of the same program.

Enduring traditions

ASM meetings encompass a number of traditions. One of these is the Nancy Atkinson Bell, which was traditionally rung to mark the start of the Annual Scientific Meeting. The idea came about as a way of recognising the contribution of one of the Society's early champions. It was suggested that, rather than having a gavel to bring meetings to order, perhaps a bell could be introduced. A sizeable metal bell on a wooden plinth was duly produced and officially named the Nancy Atkinson Bell after the esteemed mentor and pioneer. Throughout the '80s and '90s this bell was brought to the location of the Scientific Meeting each year and rung to start the Annual General Meeting. Despite an absence for a number of years at the start of the new millennium, during the mid-2000s the bell was found and resurrected. It has now been reinstated and is once again a tradition at Annual Meetings.

Nancy Millis recalls that during her presidency, the 1980 Annual Scientific Meeting was held in Dunedin, New Zealand. Despite its weight, the Nancy Atkinson Bell was transported across the Tasman, where it was incorporated into the meeting, along with a display of some of Dunedin's fine Scottish heritage:

At the dinner, which in those days was rather more formal ... to my amazement ... a pipe major in full rig preceded me down the hall, and following him was a gentleman carrying a huge silver salver upon which was this enormous haggis. As I was sort of the representative of the assembled company, I was given a sword with which I had to protect the haggis! It was quite a procession down the hall waving my sword around; a very spectacular entrance. And the haggis was enjoyed by all!¹²

The visits were formalised in 1978 when the ASM introduced its Visiting Lecturer Scheme, which became known as the International Visitors Program and later the Visiting Speakers Program. The task of selection and itinerary planning was allocated to a specific member of Council. Invited speakers were brought to Australia to undertake a national tour, attending the Annual Scientific Meeting and travelling to other states to speak at seminars organised by local branches. For smaller centres in more remote locations, such as the Northern Territory, the visit from an international speaker was often greatly appreciated – 'to have these ASM special speakers going around us on their route was terrific', recalls Val Asche of her Darwin base.¹⁵

The Visiting Lecturer Scheme continued and expanded during the 1980s, enhancing the activities and scientific programs of the ASM. Over the years, sponsorship provided by the Society, often through pharmaceutical company funding, supported prominent visitors from leading universities in the USA, the UK and across Europe. Along with the Rubbo Oration, the Visiting Lecturer Scheme and the practice of speakers visiting each of the state branches was an effective way of interacting with the international community. It ensured that high quality international scientists were contributing



This series of photos, which appeared in Australian Microbiologist, expresses the lighter side of the 1980 Annual Scientific Meeting in Dunedin.

to microbiology in Australia, both by creating a learned society and building a sense of community.

Strengthening the voice

The Australian Society for Microbiology aimed to be a voice for microbiologists and for the science of microbiology in Australia. Indeed it was an important role to play – one that would raise the profile of microbiology and build an awareness of its relevance to everyday life. It would also facilitate a better understanding of the science within the general and scientific community and raise the profile of microbiology. These things in turn would lead to an increased understanding of the work of microbiologists and the inherent value of their endeavours and their contribution to science.

One of the most fundamental ways the ASM could provide a voice for microbiology in Australia was by being involved in national and international committees. Recognising this, early office bearers of the Federal Council immediately sought to build links with related organisations. Within a year, the ASM was recognised by or affiliated with organisations such as the International Association of Microbiological Societies (IAMS), the Australian Academy of Science, the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS), and the Australian Biochemical Society

Student participation

Student participation has always been an important part of ASM meetings. Universities were connected with the Society from its very beginning, with people such as Solly Faine (VIC), Adrian Lee, Trevor Duxbury and Tony Wicken (NSW), Gordon Davis (QLD), Neville Stanley (WA), Mary Barton (SA), and various others recognising the importance of encouraging students to become involved. Members such as John Christian and Bill Murrell at CSIRO also had a strong tradition of making sure that students or young graduates participated in meetings.¹⁶

Students have consistently been encouraged to attend, and ASM meetings have a long-standing focus on students and graduates presenting papers. For many young researchers, attendance at an ASM Scientific Meeting is their first contact with microbiologists outside their own institution and the first opportunity to speak in a formal environment. In this way, these meetings play an important role for members to gain experience in the presentation of scientific data and to participate in scientific exchange.¹⁷

ASM Scientific Meetings are known for their rigorous standard of presentation.

It was the influence of Adrian Lee and Tony Wicken in the 1970s that enhanced the standard of speaking at ASM meetings. Insistence by Lee and Wicken that their students present professionally encouraged others to demand the same. This snowballed and soon became the norm. ASM prided itself on making sure speakers got their message across, did it in time, and had good slides that people could read. As a result, according to John Pitt:

... the standard of presentation of ASM is the highest that I know of in any society around the world. You can't give bad papers at ASM because you get rubbished for it and your boss gets rubbished for it.¹⁸

As the Society grew and more content was introduced, the format of the Annual Scientific Meeting needed to change. Groups such as the ABS moved in the direction of posters as their main presentation method, with some papers presented by students, but mostly symposium presentations by heads of research groups rather than young researchers. The ASM, on the other hand, retained its previous emphasis. While the Society introduced some posters and more

symposia to encompass the additional overseas speakers, it preserved the opportunity for PhD students to get up and give their first talk. Today a relatively even balance of oral presentations and posters is maintained.

The emphasis placed on student participation can still be seen today. In the lead-up to the Annual Scientific Meeting, each state holds a competition for the best student presentation. The winning student from each state gives a presentation as part of a plenary session on the opening day of the meeting. This has been an extremely successful innovation and, according to Julian Rood, the fact that it is such a feature of the program 'sends a loud and clear message by the Society that we think what students are doing and training of students is terribly important'.¹⁹

Continuing the practice of encouraging students to attend meetings has been prudent for the Society. History shows that engaging students at the meeting level often encourages them to become involved in the Society more generally and, as a result, the ASM has benefitted from a growing membership and relatively youthful leadership for many years.



Involvement of students in the ASM has always been encouraged. The influence of Adrian Lee and Tony Wicken in the 1970s enhanced the standard of presentations at Scientific Meetings, while others such as Trevor Duxbury, Gordon Davis, John Christian and Bill Murrell actively promoted the participation of students and young graduates.

Courtesy Adolph Bassler Library, Australian Academy of Science.

(ABS). Affiliation with groups like these firmly located Australian microbiologists in contemporary research, debate and inquiry.

As well as providing exposure to contemporary research and a network of scientists, the involvement of the ASM on various committees also gave the Society the opportunity to speak out on issues of importance. It gave the Society a forum, when necessary, to take a stance. For example, at an IAMS Congress held in Mexico City in 1970, a comprehensive resolution against work on biological warfare was passed.²⁰ It was an important response to a contemporary issue of international significance. With delegates attending the international Congress, the ASM was well represented and participated in the debate and the resolution that followed. The ASM was able to speak on behalf of Australian microbiologists in an international forum and contribute to a decision of overwhelming importance. In addition, soon after, the ASM passed its own resolution in support of the Mexico City decision. The ASM spoke out with a strong voice in an international forum and then developed its own policy to direct activities in Australia.²¹

Associations with ANZAAS and ABS were significant for the ASM in a slightly different way. The affiliations with these Australian-based organisations helped the ASM link to an already established scientific network at a time when it was establishing its own identity and community. But as the ASM grew and the scientific program of its meetings began to expand, it relied less on the affiliations with the

ABS and ANZAAS which had been so important for the ASM in its first decades.

Initially the ASM was forced to be proactive and request affiliation with other groups but, by the 1970s and 1980s, the ASM struggled to meet the number of requests it was receiving for input and representation. Council minutes throughout the 1970s are littered with requests from various government departments to provide expert scientific advice or representation on committees. For example, in 1974 the Minister for Science requested that the Society be involved in establishment of the Australian Science Council, which would advise on the development of science in Australia. Similarly, the Minister for Health asked the ASM to assist with the establishment of an epidemiology department within the Department of Health that would coordinate and collate information on infectious disease and viruses gathered from laboratories Australia-wide.²²

As the membership base and identity of the Australian Society for Microbiology grew and strengthened, ASM members began to proactively establish internal committees and subgroups. A submission by member Michael Alpers in 1971 led to the establishment of a Standing Committee on Environmental and Community Problems (SCENCOP). It was an assertive response to a perceived need – a need that arose from the growing profile of microbiology. The standing committee was intended to act as an ‘expert body to collect, store and make available expert knowledge

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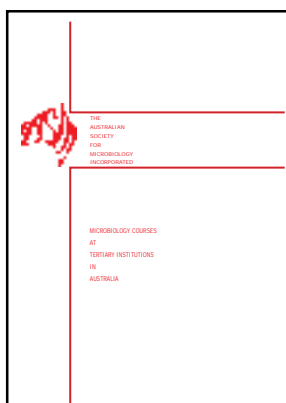
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One of the activities of the Education Group, which was the brainchild of Solly Faine and was chaired by Horst Doelle, was the preparation of a booklet containing details of each tertiary course in microbiology offered across Australia.

Portraits courtesy Adolph Basser Library, Australian Academy of Science.



and data on microbiological aspects of environmental, social and political problems'.²³ One of the first activities of SCENCOP was to compile a dossier comprising names of members and areas of expertise that covered topics such as sewage disposal, water pollution, biological warfare and the use of antibiotics. The list was then sent to state and commonwealth ministers and other potentially interested organisations and bodies. Each state provided a representative to SCENCOP, to whom external inquiries were directed.

An Education Group was also established within the ASM. It was the brainchild of Solly Faine and, once again, a representative was called for from each state. Under the chairmanship of Horst Doelle, the Education Group compiled a booklet detailing the tertiary courses in microbiology offered across Australia. The booklet was widely distributed to universities and education departments across the country, with the intention of updating the publication every two years. In 1974, Adrian Lee, also a part of the Education Group, compiled and released a catalogue of all microbiological films and slides in Australia. Like the tertiary course booklet, the catalogue was intended as a resource guide for teachers and lecturers of microbiology in Australia.

SCENCOP and the Education Group grew in size and scope. In fact, there were suggestions in the mid 1970s that a half-day meeting be scheduled during the next Annual Scientific Meeting specifically for an Education Group symposium. The rapid growth and increasing autonomy of both groups was noted by Federal Council.²⁴ Concern was raised about how Council could coordinate the activities of these subgroups and ensure that they spoke for the ASM as a whole. At the same time, a submission was made by the Queensland Branch of the ASM. Their Branch activities had diversified to the extent that certain members in Brisbane were meeting in specialised, discipline-based subgroups. Wishing to encourage and foster these subgroups, the Queensland Branch requested that Federal Council act to formalise these 'Special Interest Groups' and place them under the auspices of the federal Society rather than one particular state branch.²⁵

The relatively young society found itself in an interesting position. With ever-increasing calls to provide representatives on external committees and multiple subgroups and discipline-based Special Interest Groups forming internally, it was clear that the Society

had achieved its aim of being the voice of microbiology in Australia. Striving to meet this aim had not only helped to foster the identity of the ASM, but helped build a publicly recognisable profile for microbiology and microbiologists in Australia. As a result, the activities in which microbiologists were engaged were diversifying. Nearly two decades after its establishment, the needs of microbiologists and the demands placed on them by the broader community had changed. The federal system established in 1959 had been effective and had helped build a strong society. But could it cope with these changes without changing its structure and original terms of reference?

The professionalisation of a society

In 1976, the Australian Society for Microbiology incorporated. The highly formalised legal process of incorporation took several years to finalise and required the drafting of a Memorandum and Articles of Association as well as a new Constitution and By-Laws. The process left a vast paper trail of documentation – proposals, plebiscites, surveys and votes – that all tell of endless hours of discussion and debate about the composition and future of the ASM. It was one of the most significant turning points in the life of the Society. But what was behind the incorporation of the ASM and from where did the idea come?



The front page of ASM News in January 1976 proudly announces the Society's incorporation. This was the culmination of five years of effort and required the adoption of a new Constitution and By-Laws.

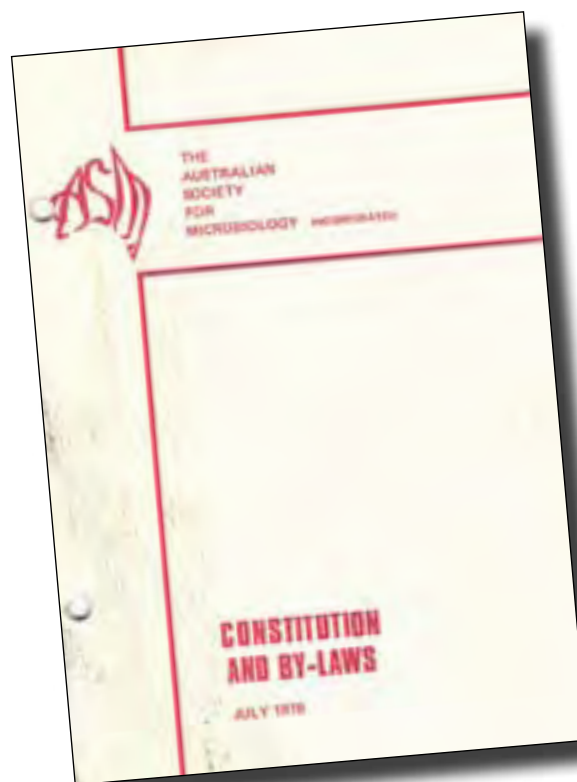
In 1970, the federal President of the ASM Geoffrey Cooper wrote a paper entitled *A National Academy for Microbiology*. It was based on his address to the Society earlier that year in which he raised the idea of creating a professional arm of the association. Cooper commented that while the Society had unquestionably met its aim of furthering the science of microbiology, 'over the past few years members have questioned the present framework of the Society and its capacity to ensure the advancement of Microbiology on a national basis'.²⁶ Cooper proposed the establishment of a National Academy or Institute for Microbiology, which would effectively establish a system of national qualification for microbiologists. His proposal was a response to the changing needs of microbiologists and in particular their need for professional representation and accreditation. He acknowledged the crucial role the ASM had played in consolidating microbiology into a stand-alone discipline but argued that it was time for the Society to become more than a learned society.

Cooper's paper was intended to spark discussion and debate among the branches. That it did. Although extremely well thought-out and comprehensive, his arguments challenged the framework and structure of the ASM. The paper called for change – carefully thought-out change, but change nonetheless. His paper set in motion a series of events that would change the direction of the Society and ultimately result in its incorporation, nationalisation and professionalisation.

Federal Council considered the proposal. The scope of the suggested change was enormous. If the Society was to expand and professionalise, it would require a redrafted Constitution and additional legal documentation. However, before the ASM could even get to this stage, it would have to consult with its entire membership and embark on a lengthy process of consultation and feedback. A plebiscite of the ASM membership indicated that, while there was not necessarily support for the establishment of a separate professional arm of the ASM, 'there was strong support for the proposal that modifications to the Society's present structure should be made in order to establish it as a nationally-oriented, professional organisation'.²⁷

A subcommittee of three – reminiscent of the subcommittee of three that worked together to draft the original Constitution of the ASM in 1958 – was appointed to explore the ways that such changes could be made. The committee, comprising Judith Howard, David Dorman and Geoffrey Cooper, began to investigate and to seek legal advice. The subcommittee established several basic tenets that preserved some of the most fundamental strengths and principals of the ASM. They agreed that the scientific activities of ASM should not be disturbed or jeopardised by the proposed changes. Similarly, they clearly stated that the existing autonomy and scope of membership and the activities of state and regional groups would be maintained.

The subcommittee also clarified some of the terms that were being thrown around in the debate. Nationalisation was declared to 'be regarded as a means of rationalising management and financial control so that each member, irrespective of the city in which he or she resides, may enjoy exactly the same benefits as any



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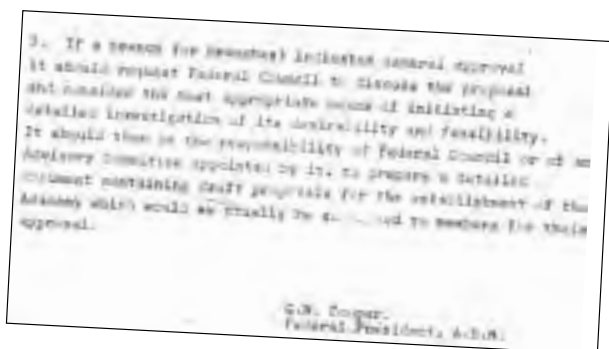
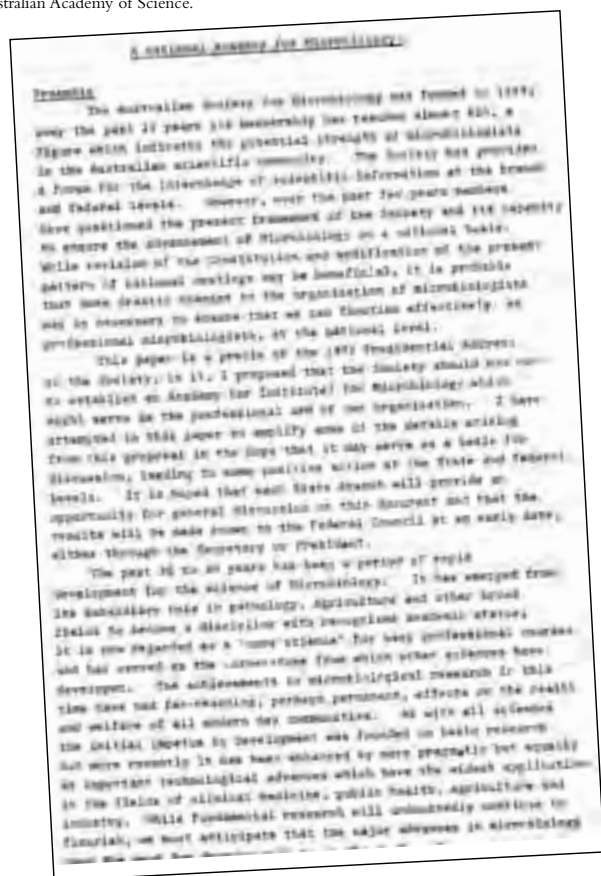


It was this paper (below), written by President Geoffrey Cooper in 1970, that set in motion a series of events that would challenge the direction of the Society and result in the ASM's incorporation six years later.

Portrait courtesy Adolph Bassor Library, Australian Academy of Science.



Judith Howard played an important role as a member of the subcommittee convened to explore the proposal to nationalise, professionalise and incorporate the ASM. Courtesy John Christian.



other member'.²⁸ Professionalisation was also explained. It would introduce a system of graded membership 'based on qualification and/or experience so that those members who have sought and acquired professional status may be recognised as such by potential employers'.²⁹ Professionalisation would allow a basis for members to negotiate with employer organisations as a qualified member of an association with an accepted professional standard.

The subcommittee proposed incorporation of the Society and argued that it was inappropriate that members of the Federal Council were personally liable to be sued, particularly given the increasing number of advocacy and committee roles the ASM was being asked to play. In addition, if the Society was to professionalise, members of Council needed to be protected against applicants or members contesting any decision that was made. They argued that 'to function effectively as a professional society, acquisition of legal status is mandatory'.³⁰

Building a new structure

After a critical process of consultation with each of the branches, details of the proposed changes were sent to all members. Those attending the Annual General Meeting in 1974 would be asked to vote on the proposed changes. If the majority were in favour, then a postal ballot of all members of the Society would be carried out. The majority were, in fact, in favour of the changes and so, shortly after the meeting, each member received copies of the legal documentation required for incorporation, together with an explanation of the proposed changes. Members were informed that the Society had grown to the extent that its effective management warranted paid clerical and secretarial work which, together with the possibility of rented office space, necessitated legal incorporation. Protecting individual members who made public statements on controversial matters from litigation was also considered essential.³¹

One of the main motivations for the national structure of the ASM was the system of fee collection. The collection of the capitation that state branches paid to the federal body had long been disparaged as cumbersome and inefficient. States collected monies and then forwarded them to the Federal Council. States were responsible for maintaining membership lists and there was no central registry. Under the proposed national system, the National Treasurer would collect fees directly and then disburse the monies to the branches. The proposed system would also channel all membership applications through the national body and enable complete and accurate membership records to be kept. All members would be members of the nationalised body. This was particularly important for the category of sustaining members, who would no longer be associated with a specific state branch, but rather the ASM as a whole. In addition, the introduction of a nationalised ASM would pave the way for the establishment of Special Interest Groups which could be Australia-wide and sit comfortably under the administration and structure of the National Council.

Professionalisation was without doubt one of the most important of the proposed changes. The benefits of professionalisation were outlined to members. It clarified that introducing professional

grades of membership '[seeks] to establish for the Society an identity, acknowledged by both the public and the private sectors, as a group of scientists who are professionally qualified to practise Microbiology, and from whom responsible and informed comment can be expected, and furthermore given'.³² It was hoped that, as a result of the professional grades, employers and other authorities would more readily recognise the professional nature of microbiology in industry, agriculture and medical diagnostic work. In addition, the interests of microbiologists, in terms of status and salaries, would also be protected.

Despite the persuasive arguments, not all were in favour of the proposed changes. Incorporation, nationalisation and professionalisation would fundamentally alter the composition of the ASM and challenge some of its founding principals.³³ Those against the changes argued that graded membership promoted class distinction, elitism, isolation and possibly corruption.³⁴ There was concern that professionalisation represented 'a threat to the learned nature of the society, reducing it to a trade union with little or no scientific value' and would only benefit a small number of people. The implementation of the changes was a further deterrent, compounded by the size and diversity of the Society. There were also fears of a large increase in subscription fees as a result of the increased costs associated with the administrative and procedural implications of accredited membership. For many, the proposed changes were not perceived to be worth the upheaval that their implementation would cause.

Despite the lengthy debate that surrounded the proposed expansion of the ASM, its structure and its roles, the results of the postal vote came out in favour. The Australian Society for Microbiology would incorporate, nationalise and professionalise. After over two decades of existence, it was poised to move into a new phase of existence. That the ASM was ready to incorporate and expand was symbolic of the distance the Society had traversed. Annual Scientific Meetings, committee membership and visiting lecturer schemes all worked together to create a learned society that had

a strong sense of identity, culture and a high standard of scientific endeavour. The ASM was a well-respected Society that helped build and strengthen microbiology as a discipline in its own right. Its incorporation, nationalisation and professionalisation would enable the ASM to continue to play a significant role in the scientific and broader community as well as diversify the services it provided to its members.

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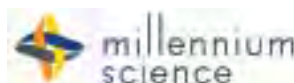


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