

# Sydney Protein Group: an ASBMB Special Interest Group



## Sydney Protein Group: fostering excellence in protein science research

In the realm of scientific communities, the Sydney Protein Group (SPG) stands as a stalwart, bringing together a diverse assembly of scientists and students from academia, research institutions, hospitals and industry. Their shared passion for protein science research has been the driving force behind SPG's endeavours since its establishment in the 1980s. With an unwavering commitment to promoting protein science and fostering inclusivity, SPG provides a vital platform for budding protein researchers and scientists at various stages of their careers.

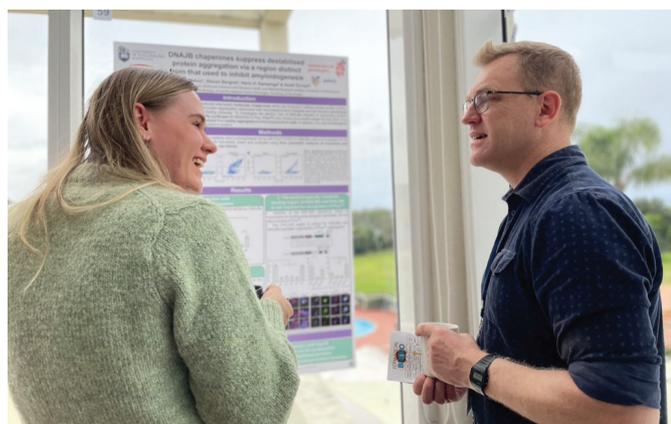
One of SPG's primary objectives is nurturing the growth of students and early- to mid-career researchers (EMCRs) in the field of protein science. SPG firmly believes in the power of knowledge sharing and interaction. As such, the group orchestrates several events throughout the year, providing opportunities for individuals to connect, discuss and present their research.

## EVENTS THAT SHAPED THE PROTEIN SCIENCE LANDSCAPE 2022–2023

### East Coast Protein Meeting

In light of the global pandemic, the majority of SPG events had been shifted online. Despite the successful transition, there was a growing demand for in-person meetings, culminating in the eagerly awaited East Coast Protein meeting in July 2022, the first since 2020.

The East Coast Protein Meeting, held in picturesque Coffs Harbour, is alternately organised by the Sydney and Queensland Protein Groups every two years. It was the SPG's turn to organise the July 2022 meeting.



Poster session at the 2022 East Coast Protein Meeting.



Prize-winners at the 2022 East Coast Protein Meeting, from left: Nikhil Varghese, Emily Furlong, Dylan Harney, Yan Li, Michael Healy, Yanni Chin and Derrick Lau.

After a rocky start with cyclone-like conditions sending several planes back to Sydney and disrupting a number of allocated talks, the meeting attendees settled into an amazing showcase of science. The meeting attracted over 110 enthusiastic registrants who experienced two compelling plenaries, an insightful industry talk, 34 EMCR presentations and more than 40 poster presentations. A huge thanks goes to SPG past President, Tara Christie, who did a large share of the organisation of this meeting.

Prizes were awarded for the best student talk (Dylan Harney) and runner-up (Carl McCombe), best postdoc talk (Emily Furlong), best student posters (Yan Li and Nikhil Varghese), best open category poster (Yanni Chin), the SPG ComBio Award (Derrick Lau), the QPG ComBio Award (Michael Healy) and Social Bingo prize (Forhad Saikot).

### Thompson Prize

A prestigious honour in the field of protein science in NSW is the award of the SPG Thompson Prize. This award is named after Professor Ted Thompson – a pioneer of molecular biology who worked with Fred Sanger on the sequencing of insulin and was a professor at UNSW for many years. Ted was a strong supporter of young researchers and of the Sydney Protein Group. In 2022, the SPG Thompson Prize event was hosted in-person at Western Sydney University's Parramatta South Campus in November, organised by Liza Cubeddu and Roland Gamsjaeger.

The Thompson Prize is awarded to the best scientific presentation by an Early Career Scientist. Five speakers, Hudson Coates (UNSW), Jason Johansen-Leete (University of Sydney), Serene El-Kamand (Western Sydney University), Julian van Gerwen (University of Sydney) and Kelsey Whinn (University of Wollongong), were selected from submitted abstracts and presented their work in a short talk format. Hudson Coates was the

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successful awardee who delivered a beautiful story of a truncated form of squalene monooxygenase and its role in cholesterol synthesis. His talk encompassed suspense, the motivation and explanation of the methods he used, followed by results that made his findings very easy to follow and their overall significance obvious. All finalists were applauded for their exceptional presentations.



*Thompson Prize winner  
Hudson Coates (left)  
with Liza Cubeddu.*

Awards for supporting early career scientists to attend conferences were bestowed upon Gayatri Mani and Mohammad Pourhassan Moghaddam (Lorne Travel Awards), and Madeline McRae (Greg Ralston Award).

## SPG Annual General Meeting

The AGM, held concurrently with the Thompson Prize event, witnessed pivotal developments within SPG's leadership. The meeting resulted in changes to the SPG Constitution, renaming the role of Webmaster to Communications Officer. Three of our long-service officers, Jason Low (Secretary), Ben Crossett (Treasurer) and Alastair Stewart (Webmaster) stepped down, making way for fresh faces. Derrick Lau assumed the role of Secretary, Mark Larence as Treasurer and Taylor Szyzka as Communications Officer.

## SPG Postdoc Symposium

Held at UNSW in May 2023, the SPG Postdoc Symposium brought together early-career scientists to listen to science from their peers and network afterwards. Five speakers were selected from submitted abstracts – Conall McGuinness (University of Wollongong), Stefan Mueller (University of Wollongong), Yan Jiang (University of Sydney), Dylan Harney (University of Sydney) and Tahnee McEwan (University of Wollongong).

Each person delivered a 15-minute scientific presentation. Connall McGuinness (first prize) and Stefan Mueller (highly commended) were recognised for their outstanding contributions with cash prizes however, the judges noted that all presenters were of outstanding quality.

## ASBMB Speaker Prize Competition

The ASBMB speaker prize is aimed at ECRs to support their attendance, and present their work at the ASBMB conference. The prize consists of the registration for the ASBMB meeting and a speaking slot in the program. In August 2023, Hannah Brown, a PhD student from University of Technology Sydney, earned the opportunity to showcase her scientific communication skills at the 2023 meeting of the ASBMB in Canberra.

## Looking forward

The SPG's commitment to advancing protein science remains unwavering. With a calendar of seminars, travel awards and networking opportunities, SPG is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of protein scientists and furthering the field. For those interested in learning more about SPG, its initiatives, and upcoming events, please visit our website or reach out for further information.

**Kate Michie, President, Sydney Protein Group**

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*2023 SPG Postdoc Symposium speakers, from left:  
Tahnee McEwan, Conall McGuinness, Stefan Mueller,  
Yan Jiang and Dylan Harney.*



*2023 SPG Postdoc Symposium prize-winners Conall  
McGuinness (left) and Stefan Mueller with Kate Michie.*