



# Annual Report

1 JULY 2023 - 30 JUNE 2024



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Australian Science Media  
Centre Inc.

Annual Review 1 July 2023 to  
30 June 2024

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# The Year in Review



This year has been an eventful one for the AusSMC, with over 25,000 news items triggered or informed by our online media briefings and expert reactions and more than 3500 high quality research stories distributed to over 2000 journalists through our Scimex platform.

The AusSMC plays a key role in informing journalists, supporting them to cover science and avoid common pitfalls. Some of the biggest news stories we helped them with this year included the release of wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power plant, the overturning of all charges against Kathleen Folbigg based on new scientific evidence and the widespread Optus outage that shut down phones and internet across much of the country. See pages 8-11 for more of the stories we worked on.

Many of these stories were global in nature and we were able to collaborate with the international network of Science Media Centres to help journalists all over the world. The global network covers Germany, the UK, Spain, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand, with more coming soon in Japan and Korea and others in the pipeline in countries like Italy, Ireland and Austria. We are very excited to be

hosting existing and emerging SMCs for three days of meetings in Adelaide in 2025, coinciding with the AusSMC's 20th Anniversary.

Also on the international front, we have continued to expand Scimex into the Pacific in collaboration with the NZ SMC and with support from the International Science Council, building media capacity in the region, providing training for Pacific-based journalists and scientists and featuring Pacific expertise and research on Scimex.

The first quarter of 2024 saw our collaborative journalism program come to fruition, involving close to 50 scientists and five newsrooms covering topics including endometriosis, carbon farming and vaping – see page 5 for details. The program was recognised with an innovation award from the Australian Science Communicators in June.

In March we launched a comprehensive online toolkit aimed at helping experts navigate online harassment, an issue that has sadly increased since the pandemic. The new resources include videos and tips for experts to help them manage abuse and get back on their feet and continue to engage with the public via the media.

And in April, we ran the very successful Indigenous Media Mentoring Program in collaboration with NITV-SBS, with nine Indigenous scientists receiving intensive media training and mentoring from journalists and media savvy experts.

From an operational viewpoint, the biggest development was the endorsement of AusSMC by the Federal Treasurer for tax deductible gift recipient status (DGR) in December. As a tax deductible charity, the AusSMC will be able to apply for more grants and accept public and private donations. This endorsement comes with greater responsibilities and will see the Centre grow its services for the public, an important development for helping people access high quality information in a sea of misinformation.

We are incredibly grateful to the AusSMC staff and Board members and to the sponsors and affiliates who continue to support this important work year after year.

**Peter Yates AM**  
Chair

**Dr Susannah Elliott**  
CEO

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# By the Numbers

6464

EXPERTS ON THE AUSSMC DATABASE  
INCLUDING 419 NEW EXPERTS

25126

MEDIA CLIPS FROM AUSSMC BRIEFINGS AND EXPERT  
REACTIONS

2007

ACTIVE JOURNALISTS REGISTERED  
WITH THE AUSSMC INCLUDING 305  
NEW REGISTRATIONS

3285

STORIES PUBLISHED ON SCIMEX

99

SETS OF EXPERT REACTIONS  
AND BRIEFINGS DISTRIBUTED TO  
JOURNALISTS - INVOLVING 578  
INDIVIDUAL EXPERT COMMENTS

638844

SCIMEX PAGE VIEWS



# Latest Developments

## Collaborative Journalism

The AusSMC's collaborative journalism program, funded by the Walkley Foundation and Meta, concluded in early 2024 with the success of five news series; About Bloody Time by News.com.au, The Carbon Series by the Australian

Community Media Agricultural team, The Future of Fertility by SBS, The Brisbane Life Study by The Brisbane Times and Vape Nation by Pedestrian. Across the newsrooms, 28 journalists collaborated with 48 scientists and other experts to produce 75 articles, seven videos and 28 infographics. The project was awarded the Australian Science Communicators Inspiring

Project in Science Communication Award in 2024. One series, About Bloody Time, focused on women's health and included a petition for a new Medicare Item Number for pelvic pain consultations. The petition attracted over 50,000 signatures and was acknowledged by the federal health minister, and the news series generated two million page views.

### A selection of stories from the Collaborative Journalism projects

**How Has Vaping Had Such A Meteoric Rise In Australia?**  
By Tom Ridge  
Published 15 March 2024  
Vaping has soared in popularity over the past few years in Australia, and it's happened around the same time that many of us are stressed out of our bloody minds.

**Brisbane is getting hotter - some parts more than others**  
Tony Pearce  
FEBRUARY 14, 2024

**Planting for their future**  
SA croppers take on 25-year commitment  
The application process was quite daunting and took around eight months, but we got there in the end. We can have an extension for whatever reason if it's beyond our control, whether it's weather or having to replace which weeds we're taking out to.

**Bill and Sana are expecting their 11th child. Families like theirs are becoming rare**  
The global population could shrink within two decades and it would bring huge challenges for us all, experts say. Read the first in our three-part series on the Future of Fertility.

## Upgrading Scimex

In 2024, the AusSMC received another grant from the Walkley Foundation's Meta Australian News Fund, this time to promote digital innovation through major updates to Scimex. Scimex was initially developed in 2015 to help journalists cover science and has become the first port of call for journalists looking for credible science story ideas and reliable experts. The AusSMC has engaged a team of web developers to improve access to key Scimex features including the newsfeed and expert profiles, as well as upgrading the tools

available to affiliated organisations to share their research and monitor their news coverage. While Scimex was initially developed for an audience of journalists, its broader public audience has also grown organically to an average audience of 40-50,000 per month. This upgrade will create a more intuitive audience interface that will help further grow this public audience.

## DGR status

In late 2023, the Federal Government announced it intended to list the AusSMC as having Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, which will allow the organisation to receive tax deductible gifts and donations. The AusSMC anticipates these changes will become official in late 2024. This new status recognises the increasingly public-facing nature of the AusSMC's work and that the majority of the Centre's activities are focused on the public interest. DGR will allow the AusSMC to seek support from philanthropic foundations and the broader Australian public.

## Indigenous Media Mentoring Program

The AusSMC is continuing to collaborate with SBS and NITV for the Indigenous Media Mentoring Program, with financial support from CSL and CSIRO. In April, nine Indigenous scientists from across the country participated in a two-day program of media training sessions held at the SBS/NITV studios in Sydney. The program was put together by the AusSMC alongside the SBS Indigenous Engagement

and Partnerships team led by Pete Ballard. Indigenous scientists and journalists were enlisted as mentors for the program, with some attending in person while others joined virtually. SBS/NITV journalist John Paul (JP) Janke led training sessions across the two days and conducted mock on-camera interviews with the participating scientists. The program also included sessions with more Indigenous journalists from SBS radio and online platforms who provided advice and feedback on the mentees' interviews, as well as story pitches they put together on their specific

area of expertise.

In 2023, the AusSMC was made aware that many previous program participants had experienced racist attacks and other forms of abuse online, likely exacerbated by the debate in the leadup to the Voice referendum. On October 3, the AusSMC facilitated an online session exclusively for Indigenous researchers to discuss the issue and give experts an opportunity to support each other in a culturally safe space. About 30 experts attended the hour-long session.

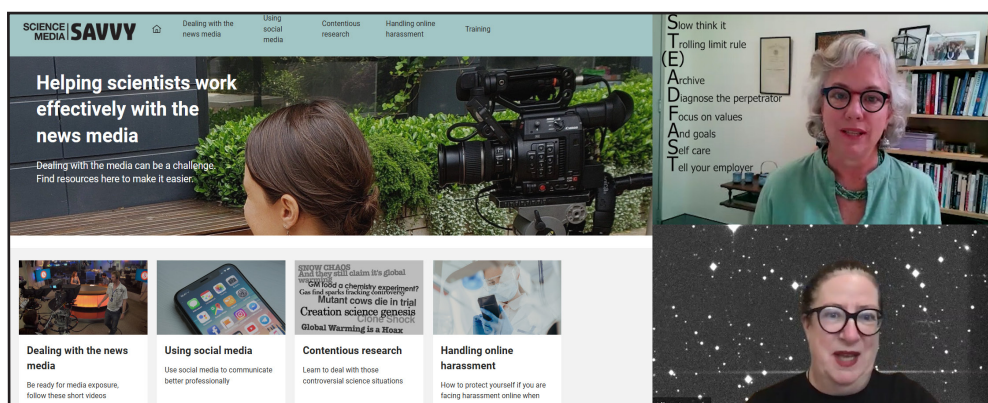


## Online harassment toolkit

In March 2024, the AusSMC launched an online toolkit to help experts both prepare for, and respond to, trolling and harassment online. The toolkit was developed following surveys conducted by the AusSMC in collaboration with the journal Nature

and later Cosmos Magazine which both found high numbers of experts are experiencing abuse on social media. The toolkit was developed with support from Springer Nature, Flinders University, The University of Sydney and CSIRO and is freely available to the AusSMC's supporter and affiliate organisations as part of the Science Media Savvy portal. The toolkit includes step-by-step guides

for experts to protect themselves from online abuse and what to do if they are on the receiving end of an online pile-on. The AusSMC has also developed workshops to help prepare early to mid-career researchers, and more in-depth sessions for researchers who have experienced online abuse firsthand.





October 2023: Superstars of STEM workshop in Adelaide



### Superstars of STEM

The AusSMC continued on as a major partner in the Superstars of STEM program run by Science and Technology Australia in 2023. The initiative aims to empower women and non-binary people working in science, technology, engineering, and maths, and the AusSMC runs a media skills component of the program. In 2023, the AusSMC delivered one online and three in-person workshops in October and November across Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide with the support of SBS and Nine. About 60 women participated across the four workshops, which consisted of newsroom visits, presentations from journalists and the opportunity to ask the journalists questions and practice being interviewed in a professional setting.

### Expanding Scimex into the Pacific

Thanks to support from the International Science Council's Regional Focal Point for Asia and the Pacific, the AusSMC has been able to continue to expand our science news portal, Scimex, into the Pacific. We now have a continuing stream of science stories relevant to the Pacific as well as Pacific experts and journalists registered with the platform. The support will allow the AusSMC to develop and deliver a programme of workshops and resources specifically for Pacific Island scholars and journalists to increase science media capability in the region throughout 2024.

### Global SMC collaboration

As more Science Media Centres establish themselves across the world, the AusSMC has been increasing its collaborative efforts with the global SMC network, through the sharing of expert reactions between centres and regular meetings with the network, which includes Germany, the UK, Spain, Taiwan, Australia and New

Zealand. The AusSMC also offers support to new and emerging SMCs. In July 2023, AusSMC media team member Olivia Henry was invited to South Korea to speak at an international summit organised by the Korea Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Creativity (KOFAC) with the aim of garnering support for the establishment of a Korean Science Media Centre. SMCs from around the world gave presentations on how their organisations function

and participated in an open meeting on how a Korean SMC might assist science communication in Korea. Later in the year, KOFAC members Jungsoon Lee and JuYeon Suh visited Adelaide to further research how SMCs work, and how valuable the services are to various stakeholders. Olivia organised meetings between the KOFAC team and various experts and media staff based in Adelaide, who spoke about how the AusSMC assists them with their day-to-day work.



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# Media Snapshots

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Expert Reactions and media briefings help provide context and independent commentary on breaking news and complex or controversial research. Our media team organised 99 Expert Reactions and media briefings during the year contributing to over 25,000 news items in Australia and overseas. Below is a sample of the stories we triggered or contributed to.

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## ► Aussie trial shows low cost ketamine works for severe depression - July 2023

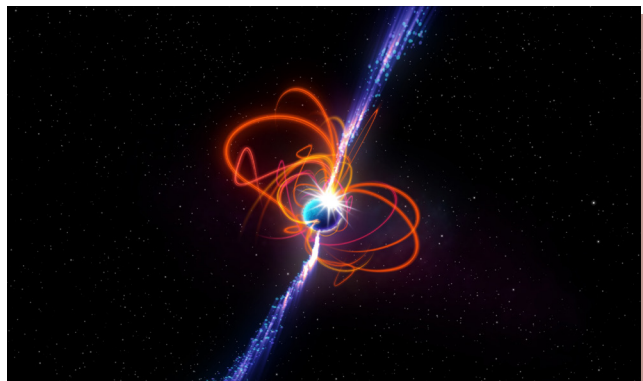
An Australian and NZ clinical trial published in July found that a low-cost version of ketamine is effective for treating severe depression when compared to a placebo. The research found that more than one in five people achieved total remission from their symptoms after a month of twice-weekly injections, while a third had their symptoms improve by at least 50%. Ketamine is commonly used as an anaesthetic for both humans and animals, and it also has a reputation as a 'party drug', but recent research has suggested it may be an effective way to help people with hard-to-treat depression. Three of the study authors, including two Australians and one NZ expert joined the AusSMC for an online briefing before the story was published to explain further



how their treatment strategy worked and what their study could mean for the treatment of mental health conditions in Australia and NZ. The researchers who participated in the briefing were quoted 563 times in the media once their study was published.

## ► New stellar object is challenging our understanding of neutron stars - July 2023

In July, Australian and international astronomers published a discovery of a new stellar object that challenges our understanding of neutron stars. The researchers said the object behaves a bit like a magnetar - a rare type of star with extremely strong magnetic fields that can produce powerful bursts of energy - but is unique because of how slowly it seems to be producing these bursts. All known magnetars release energy at intervals ranging from a few seconds to a few minutes, but the newly discovered object emits radio waves every 21 minutes, making it the longest period magnetar ever found. It is the second of its kind ever detected, following a discovery featured in another AusSMC briefing in 2022. Lead author Dr Natasha Hurley-Walker from the Curtin University node of the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research, who was involved in both discoveries, joined the AusSMC for a media briefing to discuss her research in greater



detail and answer journalist questions live online. Dr Hurley-Walker was quoted in nearly 1000 media stories following the briefing and the release of the paper.



## ► **Treated Fukushima wastewater set to be released into the ocean** - August 2023

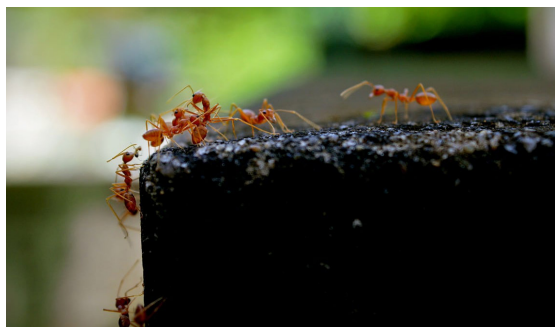
In August, Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida announced the country would begin the process of releasing treated wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea. 12 years on from the major nuclear accident in 2011, storage of water used to cool the reactor was reaching capacity, and Japanese officials said they had been able to treat the water to the point where it was no longer harmful and could be safely diluted and released into the Pacific Ocean. Following a previous expert reaction when the plan was first announced in June, the AusSMC followed up with the experts who initially provided comment, and they provided updated comments on the likely safety of the plan and potential impacts on the ocean. Associate Professor Tony Hooker from the University of Adelaide was among those who provided a comment, and he also participated in an



online briefing on the subject hosted by the NZ Science Media Centre. Three Australian experts and one from the University of Hawaii commented, and the four were quoted in the media a combined total of 2288 times.

## ► **IPBES Invasive Species Report - Australian and NZ authors speak** - September 2023

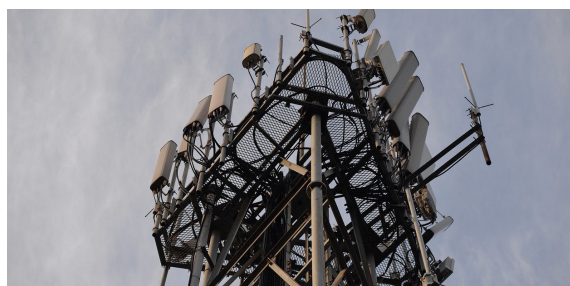
The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), often described as the 'IPCC for Biodiversity', released a report in September on invasive alien species and their control. Australian and NZ authors contributed to this report, and four of these authors joined the AusSMC for an online briefing ahead of its release focusing on what the report meant for Australia and NZ. Professor Phill Cassey told the briefing that invasive species were a major risk for Australia. "In fact, in Australia, invasive alien species are the number one driver of biodiversity loss," he said, adding that this loss caused damage to the economy, food and water security, human health and cultural identity. From foxes to fire ants, ryegrass to wild radish, invasive species cost the Australia billions of dollars every year – and the authors say their report found the impact of these



invasive species is only expected to get worse in the future. 573 media stories following the release of the report quoted the experts who participated in the media briefing.

## ► **Major Optus network outage and its cause revealed** - November 2023

In November a major Optus outage saw customers unable to make calls or use the internet or several hours, with hospitals, public transport, local businesses and other networks that piggyback off the Optus network all affected. The telecommunications company later released a statement attributing the outage to "changes to routing information from an international peering network" following a routine software upgrade. The AusSMC collected expert comments on the day of the outage and offered the experts the opportunity to comment again once the cause of the outage was revealed. The experts discussed the ways telecommunications companies could reduce the risk of outages of this scale, and Honorary Senior Lecturer Tom Worthington from the Australian



National University provided advice for businesses. "Don't have all your phones and Internet provided by the one company. If you are providing safety critical services, have connections to multiple networks," he said. Experts featured in the alerts were quoted over 1950 times following the outage.

## ► Kathleen Folbigg's convictions quashed - December 2023

Over the years, the AusSMC has been following the case of Kathleen Folbigg, who was pardoned and freed from prison in June 2023 over the deaths of her four young children. An inquiry led by Hon Thomas Bathurst AC KC had found there was reasonable doubt as to the guilt of Ms Folbigg, with new genetic evidence bringing to light the possibility of identifiable natural causes of the deaths of the children. In December, the NSW Court of Criminal Appeal quashed Ms Folbigg's convictions, and the AusSMC reached out to legal and genetic experts for their view, as well as the Australian Academy of Science which participated in the inquiry. Associate Professor Xanthe Mallett from the University of Newcastle said the case should "rock the foundations of the criminal justice system in Australia" which she said acted too slowly in reviewing the evidence. "Through its



representatives, the system obfuscated when it should have acted, shied away when it needed to be bold – in the name of justice. And justice is what we all deserve," she said. 491 media stories quoted the experts featured in the expert reaction.

## ► We may have already passed 1.5°C of global warming - February 2024

In February, an Australian-led team of researchers published a study suggesting global temperatures may have already risen by 1.5°C since the pre-industrial period. While standard estimates of warming are based on sea-surface temperature records, these only date back to the mid-1800s. The team looked at long-lived sea sponges, which contain hundreds of years of data on chemical changes within their skeletons that the researchers said could be used to estimate temperatures from much earlier. They used sponge samples from a species in the Eastern Caribbean to explore temperatures over the past 300 years, and said their estimates show 1.5°C of warming relative to the pre-industrial period has already been reached. Lead author Emeritus Professor Malcolm McCulloch from the University of Western Australia joined the AusSMC for an online briefing to discuss his

research and field questions from journalists. The AusSMC also reached out to independent climate science experts for comments on the research. Those experts and Professor McCulloch were quoted 1040 times in the media once the paper was published.



## ► Toddlers' screen time replacing vital language opportunities - March 2024

A study from Australian researchers found the average three-year-old could be missing out on more than 1,100 adult words, 840 vocalisations, and 194 conversations per day thanks to modern screen use. The team used Fitbit-like devices, worn by kids for 16-hour periods at 12, 18, 24, 30 and 36 months old, to measure how families' screen use might be affecting communication between parents and toddlers. After sorting through data from more than 7,000 hours of audio they found the toddlers seemed to be missing out on crucial words and exchanges with their parents. Lead



researcher Mary Brushe from Telethon Kids Institute joined the AusSMC for an online briefing before the study was published to present the research and answer journalist questions. Following the briefing, Dr Brushe was quoted in the media 822 times.



## ► **COVID-19 vaccines likely prevented nearly 18,000 deaths in NSW's early Omicron era**

- April 2024

The AusSMC has a strong relationship with journal publisher PLOS, with the team sending the AusSMC a weekly list of Australian papers that would normally not be promoted by PLOS to assess for media interest specifically in Australia. In April, the team sent the AusSMC a PLOS ONE paper estimating the impact of NSW's COVID-19 vaccination campaign. Using computer simulations, Australian researchers estimated vaccination likely prevented 17,760 deaths in NSW over-50s between August 2021 and July 2022 as Omicron was becoming the dominant COVID-19 variant in the country. The AusSMC promoted this paper on Scimex under embargo, and reached out to



independent COVID-19 experts to comment on the study. The paper received extensive coverage from Australian media, and the independent experts who commented were quoted in 473 stories in the days following the release of the paper.

## ► **Nuclear power plants proposed across Australia**

- June 2024

In June, federal Opposition Leader Peter Dutton announced a plan to build seven nuclear power stations across the country as part of his strategy for the next federal election. The sites would be located at retiring or retired coal sites, and under the plan, the new stations would be operational by between 2035 and 2037. The AusSMC collected comments predominantly from engineering and renewable energy experts on the feasibility of this plan. Many experts expressed concern, with Griffith University Emeritus Professor Ian Lowe telling the AusSMC that "Nuclear power is legally impossible, economically unachievable and environmentally irresponsible" with renewable energy a cheaper and quicker strategy. Associate Professor Tony Hooker from the University of



Adelaide said Australia would need to build a local nuclear workforce for the plan to be feasible. Experts featured in the alert were quoted 1300 times in the media in the following days.

## ► **Vapes to be available in Aussie pharmacies after vaping ban changes**

- June 2024

The federal government announced in June it would amend its legislation aimed at cracking down on vaping, with changes to allow e-cigarettes to be sold over the counter in pharmacies. The new changes labelled vapes as a schedule-three pharmacist-only medication rather than a prescription-only medication, and subjected them to plain packaging rules. The AusSMC reached out to vaping experts to discuss this change, and the challenge of balancing the risks vapes pose to young people with their role as a smoking cessation tool. Associate Professor Michelle Jongenelis from the University of Melbourne said controlling vaping access was vital for keeping vapes away from children, and it was "disappointing" the original bill did not receive enough support. Associate Professor Gary Chung Kai Chan from the University of Queensland



however said the change provided a "better balance" as a prescription model increases the barrier for smokers accessing vapes to help them quit. About 950 media stories quoted the experts who provided comments in the days following the expert reaction.

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# AusSMC Staff

The AusSMC team has remained consistent again this year with the same 10 staff members.

The team's hours also remained consistent this year, with 8.8 full-time equivalents during 2023-2024.

Staff at the Centre during the year were:

Dr Susannah Elliott, CEO

Lyndal Byford, Director of News & Partnerships

Dr Joseph Milton, Senior Media Officer

Nigel Kerby, Project Manager

Marilyn Arnold, Office Manager

Deb Shaw, Project Officer

Ben Kaldi, Science Information Officer

Olivia Henry, Media Officer

Rachel McDonald, Media Officer

Steven Mew, Media Officer



**Dr Susannah Elliott**  
Chief Executive  
Officer



**Lyndal Byford**  
Director of News &  
Partnerships



**Dr Joseph Milton**  
Senior Media Officer



**Marilyn Arnold**  
Office Manager



**Ben Kaldi**  
Science Information  
Officer



**Deb Shaw**  
Project Officer



**Nigel Kerby**  
Project Manager



**Olivia Henry**  
Media Officer



**Steven Mew**  
Media Officer



**Rachel McDonald**  
Media Officer

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# AusSMC Staff Activity

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## Staff were recognised for their efforts in improving science communication

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In October 2023, The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering elected AusSMC CEO Dr Susannah Elliott as a Fellow. Susannah was among 33 new fellows elected for “game-changing contributions” in a wide range of fields including science communication.

The AusSMC’s media training programs continued to help journalists and scientists alike from across Australia improve their science communication skills. Over the year, the AusSMC held a total of 52 training sessions for scientists and six for journalists, predominantly hosted by the AusSMC’s Dr Joe Milton. Journalist training sessions cover how to tell newsworthy science from hype and how to read research papers, and scientist training sessions are often an introduction to the mainstream media, interview bootcamps, social media or video trainings. The AusSMC also offers bespoke training sessions, and has begun hosting training catered specifically to culturally and linguistically diverse researchers. Four of these sessions were held for

AusSMC sponsors throughout the year including one specifically for women.

Olivia Henry, who was involved in the project, travelled to Perth to accept the award and to present the project at the conference.



At the Australian Science Communicators (ASC) conference in Perth in June 2024, the AusSMC’s collaborative journalism project was awarded the Inspiring Project in Science Communication award. The award, presented for the first time, recognises an impactful science communication project that demonstrates innovation or a best-practice led approach. Staff member

As part of a science communication symposium run by Springer Nature in December 2024, AusSMC staff met with directors of the Taiwan and NZ SMCs and a Korean representative to discuss the potential development of a regional Asia Pacific network and how the organisations can best collaborate on overlapping issues in the region.



# AusSMC mentions in the Media

The Centre's name appeared in the media well over 2500 times reaching an audience of over 45 million

The screenshot shows a Google search for "Australian Science Media Centre". The search results are displayed in a grid format. On the left, there are four search results from Science Media Centre, SBS Australia, Brisbane Times, and The Advertiser. On the right, there are four search results from Live Science, News.com.au, SBS Australia, and SBS Australia. Each result includes a thumbnail image, the source name, the headline, and a brief description of the article.

Source	Headline	Date
Science Media Centre	Fiona Fox's blog: on science and the media	23 May 2024
SBS Australia	Bill and Sana are expecting their 11th child. Families like theirs are becoming rare	3 Mar 2024
Brisbane Times	If you build it, will they come? Calls for a rethink on social infrastructure planning	21 Feb 2024
The Advertiser	SA's STEM superstars: Meet the women changing the world	3 Nov 2023
Live Science	China's respiratory outbreak is 'expected' and not caused by new virus	29 Nov 2023
News.com.au	We need 20,000 signatures by March 8	1 Mar 2024
SBS Australia	What was thought to be a 'significant' COVID-19 milestone wasn't at all	12 Apr 2024
SBS Australia	Pioneering procedure made Vali the luckiest unlucky person you'll meet	17 Mar 2024
SBS Australia	Could artificial intelligence bring new hope to couples facing infertility?	

AusSMC staff Joe, Lyndal, Olivia and Steven have continued their regular appearances on radio shows across the country, discussing some of the most interesting science stories featured on Scimex each week.

Joe and Lyndal are regulars on ABC Darwin and ABC NSW/ACT Evenings, and participate in ABC Nightlife's 40 minute science program. Olivia and Steven continue to share

a regular radio slot on 5AU/5CS which encompasses regional South Australia including the Mid North, Clare Valley, Yorke Peninsula, Spencer Gulf, as well as the Flinders Ranges and Roxby Downs.

The ABC's MediaWatch continues to approach the AusSMC for assistance in producing segments on science misinformation in the Australian media, and the AusSMC fielded over

400 direct media enquiries from journalists throughout the year.

In December 2023 the AusSMC also released our annual Top Ten Science Stories, and Top Ten Weird Science Stories. These help to generate coverage over the usually quiet holiday period, and Joe spoke to Australian media outlets across TV, radio and online about both lists.



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# AusSMC Board

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The Board is chaired by Peter Yates AM and meets four times a year. Deputy chairs are Robyn Williams from the ABC and Professor Merlin Crossley from the University of New South Wales. The Centre's Audit Risk and Remuneration Committee is Chaired by Dr Michael Ellies. At 30 June, board members included:

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**Peter Yates AM (Chair)** Chairman, Business and Economics Board, Faculty of Business and Economics, The University of Melbourne

**Julia Naughton** Head of Life - Culture, Lifestyle and Travel, Nine Entertainment Co.

**Professor James Wallman** Dean of Science, University of Technology Sydney (UTS)

**Professor Melissa Brown** Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, The University of Queensland

**Melvin Mansell** Chairman, The Advertiser Foundation, News Corp Australia

**Distinguished Professor Melinda Fitzgerald** Pro Deputy Vice-Chancellor, (Research), Curtin University

**Anna-Maria Arabia** Chief Executive, Australian Academy of Science

**Professor Raymond Chan** Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Flinders University

**Professor Emma Johnston** Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research, The University of Sydney

**Professor Merlin Crossley (Deputy Chair)** Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic, The University of New South Wales

**Robyn Williams (Deputy Chair)** Presenter, Science Show, ABC

**Kristy Redfern** General Counsel, AIA Australia

**Professor Moira O'Bryan** Dean of the Faculty of Science, The University of Melbourne

**The Hon Peter Malinauskas MP** Premier of South Australia

**Dr Darren Saunders** Deputy Chief Scientist and Engineer for New South Wales

**Jim Carroll** Private Consultant

**Tanya Bowes** Director of Corporate Affairs, CSIRO

**Professor Andrew Lowe** Director, Environment Institute, The University of Adelaide

**Dr Michael Ellies** Non-Executive Director

**Nick Campbell** Vice President, Academic Affairs, Nature Portfolio & Springer Nature

The AusSMC's June 2024 board meeting was hosted by the Queensland University of Technology



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# List of Media Briefings and Expert Reactions

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The following is a full list of the media briefings ([blue](#)) and Expert Reactions the Australian Science Media Centre organised over the past year. Collectively, they generated over 25,000 media hits in Australia and overseas.

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## 2023

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### ► July 2023

- Global average temperature reaches hottest on record
- BOM still not declaring El Niño despite WMO declaration
- 'Limited' evidence for cancer risk from common sweetener aspartame
- [Aussie trial shows low cost ketamine works for severe depression](#)
- [Australia's latest HIV diagnosis rates](#)
- [New stellar object is challenging our understanding of neutron stars](#)
- First look into psilocybin's potential to treat anorexia
- July 2023 set to be the world's hottest on record

### ► August 2023

- UNESCO keeps GBR off the 'in danger' list
- BOM leaves Australia on El Niño Alert
- Space junk 'light show' over Melbourne
- How will new COVID-19 subvariant Eris impact Australia?
- Pig kidneys implanted into a brain-dead patient appear to function normally
- Origins of the SARS-CoV2 Virus
- Treated Fukushima wastewater set to be released from Thursday
- Australian Government's 2023 Intergenerational Report shows growing economic and societal pressures
- New RSV vaccine could be potent against future variants, suggests animal study
- Mouse study suggests eating emulsifiers during pregnancy and lactation linked to health risks
- Cancer drug shows promise in killing 'silent' HIV cells, and delaying the virus from re-emerging in mice



## September 2023

- [IPBES Invasive Species Report - Aus and NZ authors](#)
- Senate releases report into concussion and head trauma in sports
- Aussies' wellbeing has improved since COVID-19, but not back to original levels
- Risk for blood clots in women taking painkillers and hormonal contraception
- Dolly the sheep scientist Sir Ian Wilmut dies aged 79
- Should you give your cat a vegan diet?
- France stops iPhone 12 sales due to radiation level concern
- BOM declares an El Niño
- Australia is abandoning efforts to eradicate the varroa mite in NSW
- Government announces 12-month inquiry into Australia's COVID-19 response
- hMPV on the rise in Australia

## October 2023

- Gut risks linked to group of diabetes/weight loss drugs that includes Ozempic
- Gene-editing could protect chickens against bird flu
- Mouse study finds spermidine supplementation could improve female age-related fertility declines
- Deadly bird flu outbreaks are no longer just coming from Asia
- Melting of the West Antarctic Ice Shelf may now be inevitable

## November 2023

- What next after Australia signs Bletchley Declaration?
- Senate report on assessment and support services for people with ADHD
- Global fossil fuel production set to be more than double amount that would keep warming below 1.5°C
- Major Optus network outage
- Semaglutide may reduce the risk of death from heart disease in overweight people
- Cause of Optus outage revealed
- Imminent volcanic eruption in Iceland
- Ozone levels may not be recovering after all, and the hole could be expanding
- [Australia's AI moment has arrived and it's make or break time](#)
- Should we be concerned about the rise in respiratory illnesses in China?
- [What can we expect from COP28 and the Global Stocktake?](#)
- Millennials are driving Australia's declining mental health status
- Murray-Darling Basin deal
- Contaminated saline found in Queensland hospitals
- [Fossil fuel emissions reach record high - Global Carbon Budget](#)

## December 2023

- Draft COP28 agreement text criticised for fossil fuel omission
- Final COP28 agreement signed, committing to 'transition away from fossil fuels'
- Kathleen Folbigg's convictions quashed
- National health survey: 8 in 10 Aussies have a long term health condition

# 2024

## January 2024

- What's up with the latest weather forecasting?
- Could blood proteins hold the key to the cause of long COVID?
- Doomsday clock remains at 90 seconds to midnight

## February 2024

- [We may have already passed 1.5°C of global warming](#)
- BoM Annual Climate Statement 2023
- Tanning beds resurface as 'collariums' despite ban
- Smokers are more likely to quit cigarettes if they switch to vapes
- New ultrasound technique could boost sperm movement by 266%
- [Deepfakes are here to stay - so where to next?](#)
- Big data shows COVID-19 vaccine side-effects
- Vaping, smoking and cocaine: Results from Australia's National Drug Strategy Household Survey
- Junk food linked to over 30 physical, mental health and sleep problems
- [Making sense of summer's weird weather, and what's coming next](#)

## March 2024

- Fluid from around a growing baby could be used to grow organ-like structures
- [Toddlers' screen time replacing vital language opportunities](#)
- [Are we over-medicalising menopause?](#)
- Can we bring coral reefs back from the brink?
- Apple cider vinegar may help young obese people to lose weight
- Long COVID may be no different to other long term virus effects
- Chemicals in some disinfectants and flame retardants damage supporting cells of the brain in the lab
- Common contraceptive hormone linked to increased brain tumour risk



## ► April 2024

- Tsunami warnings as earthquake hits Taiwan
  - Prof Peter Higgs, who proposed the 'God particle', has died aged 94
  - Australia (did not) record zero COVID-19 deaths for at least a week
  - COVID-19 vaccines likely prevented nearly 18,000 deaths in NSW's early Omicron era
  - Worst summer on record for the Great Barrier Reef
  - The Devil Comet is now visible in the sky as it passes Earth
  - Australia is having more frequent fires and it is bad news for threatened species
  - [How do we ensure a thriving Murray-Darling Basin in 50 years?](#)
- 

## ► May 2024

- Examining the impact of IVF on childhood cancer risk
  - Federal Budget 2024-2025
  - Electronic prescription company MediSecure victim of 'large-scale' data breach
  - Fluoride exposure during pregnancy and links to neurobehavioural problems in kids
  - Will greenhouse gases be ruled 'pollution' when it comes to the Law of the Sea
  - Bird flu (H7N7) detected at Victorian poultry farm
  - Hundreds feared dead following landslide in Papua New Guinea
  - Ticketmaster customers caught up in cybersecurity incident
- 

## ► June 2024

- [Carbon capture and removal has a long way to go to curb climate change](#)
- Should we ban social media for under 16s?
- Proposed nuclear power plants
- Australian locations with high suicide rates could be targets for prevention
- Vapes to be available in Aussie pharmacies after vaping ban changes
- Mushroom gummies recalled after several hospitalisations

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# Partners and Affiliates

All support is capped at 10 per cent of the AusSMC's budget to maintain the Centre's independence. The AusSMC is grateful to the following supporters during 2023-24:

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## FOUNDATION PARTNERS

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## OTHER SUPPORTERS AND PROJECT SPONSORS



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# Financials

Income	2024(\$)	2023 (\$)
Sponsorships	788,482	792,769
Scimex	27,830	23,000
Scimex Phase 3	225,000	-
Indigenous Media Mentoring	30,000	31,000
Collaborative Journalism Project	-	110,112
Harassment program	-	39,991
Affiliation	170,370	155,800
Cost recovery	75,527	18,461
Subscriptions and uploads	21,262	15,574
Pacific Project	-	67,526
Other income	3,649	23,025
Interest received	27,368	8,300

Total Income	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
	1,369,488	1,285,507

<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>2024 (\$)</b>	<b>2023 (\$)</b>
Salaries and wages	943,659	879,920
Indigenous Media Mentoring	11,920	8,422
Pacific Project	-	49,621
Collaborative Journalism Project	49,251	8,883
Scimex	54,208	79,632
Media team/briefings	12,750	10,244
Office expenses	91,261	74,957
Depreciation	4,911	2,275
Travel expenses	31,082	33,991
Board costs	6,057	4,609
Other expenses	14,284	2,519
Scimex Phase 3	41,384	-
Harassment program	-	20,334

<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>2024 (\$)</b>	<b>2023 (\$)</b>
	1,260,767	1,175,407

	<b>2024 (\$)</b>	<b>2023 (\$)</b>
Surplus	108,721	110,100
Other comprehensive income	-	-
<b>Total comprehensive surplus for the year</b>	<b>108,721</b>	<b>110,100</b>
<b>Retained surplus at the end of the financial year</b>	<b>1,164,869</b>	<b>1,056,148</b>





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