

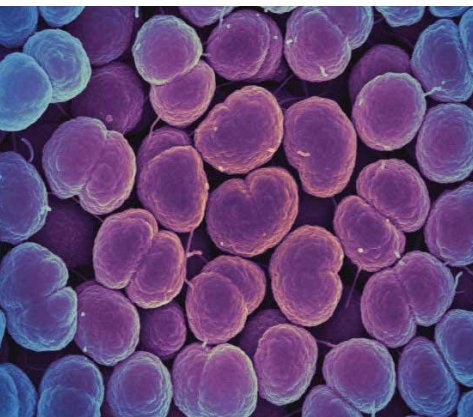
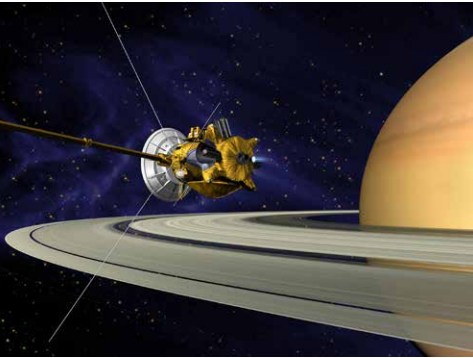


ANNUAL REVIEW  
1 JULY 2016 TO 30 JUNE 2017





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Australian Science Media Centre Inc.  
Annual Review 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017

Designed and produced by: Australian Science Media Centre

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World's biggest battery being built in SA. Credit: Tesla

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The Australian Science Media Centre (AusSMC) turned 11 this past year and has become our nation's science press gallery. With over 1,400 journalists signed up alongside 4,700 expert scientists, the AusSMC drives the evidence-based science news agenda in Australia's media every day.

The AusSMC is the only independent, national, not-for-profit organisation that provides the media with direct access to evidence-based science and expertise on a large scale. It is not an arm of the government, business, science or education sectors. It is a public good outfit funded by a wide range of organisations who believe in the need for the unique evidence-based science content that the AusSMC generates for the Australian media.

Special thanks go to our long list of supporters, hard-working staff and board, whose unwavering support has ensured a bumper year for the Centre, at a time when the demand for accurate, evidence-based, timely science and expertise is as strong as ever.

Our breaking science news portal, Scimex, continues to be refined and improved. Much of the year was spent working on a major upgrade of Scimex, which has since gone live with a new-look home page, story pages and an increased focus on multimedia, with thanks to the Australian Government's Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. The site continues to build its momentum with journalists and is now receiving almost 30,000 page views each month.

A raft of other projects kept us busy during the year, including the Indigenous media mentoring program which got underway in the second half of 2016, and closer ties with China were forged through a grant with the Australia-China Council.

This year the Centre held 25 media briefings and generated 82 sets of expert reactions on topics as diverse as Cyclone Debbie, the world's biggest battery, Cassini's visit to Saturn, HIV and childhood asthma.

As the Centre approaches its 12th birthday, we are busy on many fronts as the media world continues to evolve. Media training is now a major activity of the centre. During the year, the Centre ran both physical training sessions and our first online event for around 80 scientists and media officers with a session on video and visuals. Watch this space as we work towards a stronger focus on multimedia and video content into the future.



Peter Yates AM  
Chair

Lyndal Byford  
Acting CEO

# BY THE NUMBERS

Over 4,700  
Australian  
experts on the  
SMC database

467 new  
experts  
added in  
2016-17

1,440 active  
journalists  
registered with  
the SMC

353 new  
journalist  
registrations

25 media  
briefings  
presented to  
journalists

Involving  
71  
experts

Over 13,300  
media clips  
tracked to SMC  
output

(excluding SMC Picks  
and Scimex)

3,193 stories  
published on  
Scimex

676 enquiries  
received from  
the media

82 sets of  
expert  
comments  
distributed  
to journalists

Involving  
415  
expert  
comments

342,934 Scimex  
page views

92,903  
Scimex  
users

7,800  
Twitter  
followers

(as of 30 June 2017)

1,597  
Facebook  
'likes'

# LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

## SCIMEX IMPROVEMENTS

The last 12 months have seen a significant upgrade to our flagship science news portal, Scimex.org.



Over 1,400 journalists actively used the site during the year, while a general audience of 92,000 users viewed almost 350,000 pages. Encouragingly, the average session duration is above 4 minutes amongst journalists, well above the industry average and an indicator of high engagement.

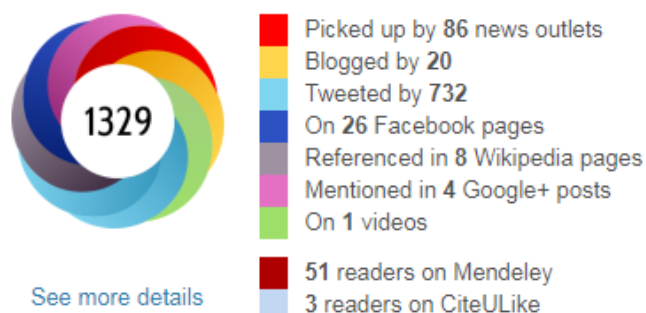
With the financial support of the Australian Government's Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, a raft of improvements including a redesign of the home page, new look story pages and a stronger focus on multimedia were commissioned as part of Scimex "Phase 2".

Research organisations can now also track the media outlets that view their stories and view Altmetrics, providing a visual breakdown of an article's digital impact and reach.

Scimex Daily - an automated email that goes out to journalists each day - was successfully launched in the second half of 2016 and has proved very popular.

This round of improvements has been rolled out progressively from early 2017 and is due to be completed by the end of 2017.

### Altmetric score



## SUPPORT FOR THE CENTRE

Support for the Centre continued to grow as we gained two new Foundation Sponsors during the year, the Australian National University and the University of Tasmania.



Our group of supporting Affiliates also expanded with Western Sydney University, Murdoch University, the Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC, The Menzies School of Health Research and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) joining as affiliates.



Australian  
National  
University



# LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

## INDIGENOUS MEDIA MENTORING PROGRAM

The Indigenous media mentoring pilot program was supported with a grant from the National Australia Bank (NAB) and was launched in Sydney on 31 August 2016. As part of the project, 11 Indigenous researchers undertook three intensive days of training in Sydney in September 2016, including a day at NITV, a division of SBS.

Seven of the experts then undertook placements with major media outlets including the ABC, The Guardian, The Conversation and Fairfax.

Off the back of our pilot program in 2016, the AusSMC has been given an Inspiring Australia grant to run a similar program during National Science Week in August 2017.

Feedback from the participants has been very positive. Perhaps the most important longer term objective of a program like this is to nurture more indigenous “science heroes” in the mainstream media. Having Indigenous researchers more visible and engaged in debate and discussion about Indigenous and non-Indigenous issues is a benefit to all of us.



## MULTIMEDIA STRATEGY

A renewed focus on video and multimedia led to the commissioning of a report from former Channel Ten news head, Grant Heading, to assess the current needs of newsrooms for visual material, the capacity of the university sector to create it and the role the AusSMC could play as facilitator.

Several recommendations have been actioned during the year that included training for scientists and media teams in smart phone video production. We see this as an important first step towards increasing video and image content on Scimex.

We ran three video training sessions with our Foundation partner universities, including an online event attended by 80 scientists and media officers and with more in the pipeline. Watch this space as we roll out more initiatives in the ever-changing digital space.



# LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

## AUSTRALIA-CHINA COUNCIL GRANT

The AusSMC was successful in gaining a grant from the Australia-China Council to develop a collaborative relationship with the developing Chinese Science Media Centre. Activities included reciprocal meetings between the Chinese SMC and the Australian SMC to share information, protocols and procedures.

Joe Milton and Lyndal Byford visited Beijing in March 2017, which included visiting local media outlets (eg: Xinhua News Agency and the China Science Daily) and meeting the company behind WeChat, China's most important social media channel with 846 million users.

Five members of the developing Chinese SMC and its governing organisation, CRISP, visited the AusSMC for two days in April 2017.

There is strong government support for science communication in China and we look forward to a growing relationship with this important region.



Joe Milton delivers media training in Beijing



Joe Milton and Lyndal Byford visit the owners of WeChat



Chinese delegation visit Adelaide

## SCIENCE MEDIA CENTRES MEETING IN GERMANY

In September 2016, Susannah Elliott and Lyndal Byford attended a meeting of all existing and developing SMCs hosted by the new German SMC in Cologne. It was an opportunity for the active UK, Australian, NZ and German SMCs to get together and share experiences and information.



Global SMC meeting in Germany

## SCIENCE ADVISORS MEETING - BRUSSELS, SEPTEMBER 2016

Also in September 2016, Susannah Elliott from the AusSMC attended the 2nd International Network for Government Science Advice Conference in Brussels, Belgium, along with Peter Griffin from the NZ SMC.

The event was well attended by science advisers from around the world, including Australia's Chief Scientist and AusSMC patron, Dr Alan Finkel.

It was a great opportunity to find out what the most pressing issues are globally and to make advisers more aware of the growing SMC network.



Susannah Elliott with Dr Alan Finkel in Belgium

# MEDIA SNAPSHOT

The AusSMC organised 25 media briefings and sent out 82 sets of expert comments during the year. Below is a sample of the stories we launched or contributed to.

## IVF, sex selection and surrogacy – April 2017

The NHMRC approached the AusSMC to help launch their latest review of the ethical guidelines around IVF, including the use of sex selection for non-medical reasons.

Despite the committee's majority view that there 'may be some circumstances where there is no ethical barrier to the use of sex selection', the guidelines maintained the current ban.

The AusSMC hosted a briefing to launch the guidelines but also sought independent experts' comments on the decision, some of whom disagreed with the NHMRC's ban. Journalists from The Guardian, AAP, News Corp and Fairfax tuned in to the briefing, generating almost 200 news stories.



Daily Telegraph

## Snowy hydro 2.0 – March 2017

In March, just days after the SA Government released its electricity plan, the Federal Government announced its own intervention in the electricity debate with a \$2bn expansion of the Snowy Mountains hydro scheme.

The AusSMC gathered expert comments, which addressed both the likely impacts on the national electricity grid and the water resources in the area affected.



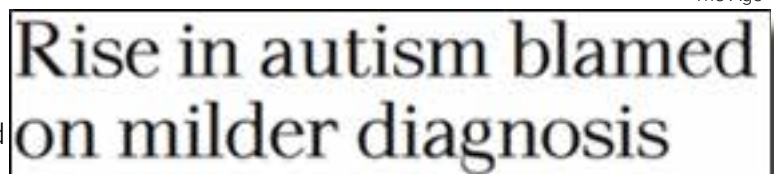
Canberra Times

The reaction generated 520 media hits, including Sky News, ABC Radio and SBS.

## Does diagnosis of less severe autism in children explain the 'epidemic'? – Jan 2017

Rates of autism diagnosis have increased 20-fold over the last 30 years, raising questions as to whether more children are being born with autism, or if diagnosis is just becoming more common.

We held a briefing to explain a Telethon Kids Institute study which suggested the so-called 'autism epidemic' is in fact just a case of increased awareness and better diagnosis of people with milder autism, rather than a true growth in the condition.



The Age

The briefing generated 447 news stories, with journalists from outlets including AAP and the Sydney Morning Herald tuning in.



# MEDIA SNAPSHOT (CONTINUED)

## Oldest evidence of Aboriginal Australians in the outback – November 2016

ABC News 24

The discovery of a rock shelter in South Australia's Flinders Ranges revealed that Aboriginal Australians settled the arid outback 10,000 years earlier than previously thought - around 49,000 years ago.

The finding also pushes back the dates of the oldest bone and stone tools and the earliest-known use of ochre in Australia.



An AusSMC briefing with the experts who led the project generated 1,256 media hits, with 664 of these from overseas outlets including CNN and the BBC.

## Tassie devils beating cancer by evolving rapidly – August 2016

Australian Geographic

Researchers from Griffith University discovered that Tasmanian Devils are evolving resistance to the aggressive Devil Facial Tumour Disease. The results suggested that Tassie devils have evolved to resist the disease in just four to six generations.

We collected expert comments to help break down the findings for journalists. The comments generated 397 media hits, including New Scientist, The Herald Sun, ABC and Australian Geographic.



## Robot babies increase pregnancy rates in teens – August 2016

Seven News

In August 2016, landmark research from the Telethon Kids Institute found that electronic baby dolls, designed to simulate the 'real experience' of having an infant, don't work to cut teen pregnancy rates. The research revealed that teenage girls who used the dolls were in fact more likely to become pregnant.

One of the study authors took part in a media briefing to explain the surprising results, generating 1,217 media hits, including features on Seven News, Channel Nine and Ten.



## Juno's Jupiter jaunt – July 2016

ABC News 24

NASA reported that the spacecraft Juno had entered orbit around Jupiter, and would be settling in for the long haul to collect data from our Solar System's biggest planet.

The AusSMC gathered comments from local experts and their reaction were picked up in 199 news stories, including ABC News 24, Radio National and The Age.



# AUSSMC STAFF

Staff numbers were relatively stable. While Nigel Kerby was away on a 12 month voluntary placement in Indonesia, Kylie Stonard did a great job taking on project management of Scimex phase 2.

We were sad to lose Melanie Bagg who moved to Canberra in April 2017 to take up the role of Director of Communications at the Australian Academy of Science. It's a fantastic opportunity for Melanie and we wish her all the best. In early 2017, Annie Robinson joined the team in Supporter Relations.

Staff at the Centre during the year were:

- Dr Susannah Elliott, CEO
- Lyndal Byford, Media Manager
- Dr Joseph Milton, Senior Media Officer
- Nigel Kerby, Project Manager (on leave)
- Kylie Stonard, Project Manager
- Dr Melanie Bagg, Business Development and Partnerships Manager
- Marilyn Arnold, Office Manager
- Meg Duggan, Support Officer
- Ben Kaldi, Science Information Officer
- Anna Kosmynina, Media Officer
- Emily Erickson, Project Assistant
- Annie Robinson, Supporter Relations



## AusSMC STAFF OUT AND ABOUT

Staff were regularly in demand to discuss interesting science stories in the media.

Susannah Elliott and Joe Milton continued their involvement with the Research Filter segment on ABC RN Drive, hosted by Patricia Karvelas. Melanie also held regular 'medical science myth busting' slots on ABC Adelaide Mornings. All three were also regular guests on 2CC radio in Canberra.

ABC RN Drive Research Filter interviews can be found at [www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive).

In other outreach, Joe Milton ran a three-hour workshop at The Walkley Foundation's Storyology in August 2016 titled 'How to spot shit science.' The presentation explored the alarm bells journalists should listen out for when they're reporting on science issues. Lyndal Byford also gave a talk on our 'Scientist in Residence' program at the same event.

In February 2017, Susannah Elliott and Melanie Bagg presented at the Australian Science Communicators National Conference and in March, Susannah Elliott was a panelist at the annual Science Meets Parliament event in Canberra.





# LIST OF MEDIA BRIEFINGS AND EXPERT REACTIONS

The following is a full list of the media briefings (blue) and expert reactions the Science Media Centre organised over the past year. Collectively they generated over 13,000 media hits in Australia and overseas.

## JUNE 2017

Field tests show insecticide impact on bees  
We have three years to fix the climate  
Caffeinated critters: buzzed mice lose weight  
2016 Census data released  
Murray-Darling Basin plan will fail - Wentworth report  
UNESCO report - Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Coral Reefs  
Paracetamol in pregnancy and male sexual development  
Finkel Report - Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market  
[Ancient skulls show we humans are 100,000 years older than we thought](#)  
Donald trump pulls the US out of the Paris climate agreement

## MAY 2017

[A wet and wheezy winter](#)  
Changes to NHMRC funding announced  
[Move over DNA, sugars are a new frontier to attack cancer](#)  
Statins may not be worth it for older people  
Prozac during pregnancy linked to birth defects  
Wannacry malware holds the world to ransom  
National research infrastructure roadmap released  
Federal Budget 2017-18  
Painkillers a heart risk from the start

## APRIL 2017

[‘Evolution-bending’ gene drives could conquer pests, but what are the risks?](#)  
Cassini spacecraft’s grand Saturn finale  
Is popular belief that saturated fats clog up arteries ‘plain wrong’?  
Aussies to March for Science  
[IVF, sex selection and surrogacy: Release of the NHMRC Ethical guidelines on the use of assisted reproductive technology](#)  
Touchscreens for toddlers are stifling sleep  
Syrian chemical attack

## MAR 2017

“World’s biggest” battery and solar farm to be built in SA’s Riverland  
Very low frequency electromagnetic field exposure linked to motor neurone disease  
Trump signs order to remove Obama’s climate change policies  
Tropical Cyclone Debbie  
[New Aussie malaria vaccine succeeds in tests on humans, including the Professor behind it](#)  
National Science Statement released  
Snowy hydro 2.0  
[Getting your head around the Aussie electricity debate](#)  
Diabetes drug may treat fatal brain disease  
South Australia’s energy plan  
[Hair sample DNA reveals Aboriginal arrival, spread, and stay](#)  
Does pesticide exposure during pregnancy affect kids’ behaviour later?

## FEB 2017

WHO releases list of most dangerous superbugs  
Medical marijuana sale approved  
Five killed in Melbourne plane crash  
Clinical trial of once-promising Alzheimer's drug stopped  
['Clean coal' - light at the end of the tunnel or pipe dream?](#)  
Adelaide earthquake  
South eastern Australia swelters through a heatwave  
[Black Saturday and Barrier Reef bleaching - what's to blame and what's next?](#)  
Ban on nicotine e-cigarettes to remain

## JAN 2017

More extreme weather and blackouts in SA  
[Does diagnosis of less severe autism in children explain the 'epidemic'?](#)  
Excess Alzheimer's protein hurts brain's GPS  
2016 confirmed as hottest year on record\*  
Arthur Sinodinos announced as new Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science  
Kids given alcohol by their parents more likely to drink, but less likely to binge  
Different protein clumps for different 'types' of Alzheimer's

## DEC 2016

Food poisoning spike in Victoria  
Aceh earthquake causes deaths  
AusSMC top ten science stories  
[Poo, power and pot-roasts: Australia's big nitrogen footprint](#)

## NOV 2016

[Scorchers, cyclones, skin cancer, sharks and salmonella a sneak peek at this summer](#)  
Donald Trump plans to scrap climate science research at NASA  
Large clinical trial of promising Alzheimer's drug fails  
New Zealand and Japanese earthquakes and tsunami  
Strong earthquake in NZ triggers tsunami  
Global carbon emissions growth stalls for third consecutive year  
[Kirby STI / HIV stats](#)  
Australia ratifies Paris climate agreement  
[2013's angry summer may be our new 'normal' by 2035 - can COP22 save us?](#)  
Paris Climate Change Agreement comes into force  
[Oldest evidence of Aboriginal Australians in the outback](#)  
ABC TV announces new Catalyst format  
Connecting Australia to the journey to Mars  
Vitamin D deficiency linked to childhood asthma

## OCT 2016

BOM and CSIRO release [State of the Climate 2016](#)  
[Aussie scientist builds world first VR anatomy tool for the Oculus Rift](#)  
[Choosing Wisely: The medical tests, treatments and procedures Australia should rethink](#)



Pollies link SA's blackouts to renewable energy  
 First baby born using "3 person IVF" to treat mitochondrial disease  
[Is the end in sight for hepatitis C in Australia?](#)  
 Smarter cities make healthier people  
 The UN brings the battle to superbugs  
 DNA shows Aboriginal Australians' origins  
 August 2016 - Another record-breaking scorcher  
[Health effects of water fluoridation - NHMRC draft information paper release](#)  
 Future heat-waves a threat to Australian plant life  
 Cholesterol lowering medication harms hyped  
[Trends in Aussie drug use - ecstasy's back, heroin overdoses and mental illness guidelines](#)  
 Aussies to probe warped space-time with new gravitational waves research centre  
 Climate Change Authority scientists label Authority report "untrue and dangerous"

Tassie devils beating cancer by evolving rapidly  
 Magnitude 6.8 'quake hits central Myanmar  
 Magnitude 6.2 'quake hits central Italy  
[Robot babies increase pregnancy rates in teens](#)  
[Pioneering infertility treatment less invasive, cheaper than IVF](#)  
 Paracetamol in pregnancy linked to behavioural problems in kids  
 Rio experts  
[New vaccine for strep throat and rheumatic fever to enter human trials](#)

Dolly clones celebrate their baa-rthday and are ageing well  
 Man-made bacteria self-destruct to fight cancer  
 Antarctic Peninsula warming grinds to a halt  
 Terror attack in Nice, France  
 Biodiversity drops to 'unsafe levels' on more than half of the world's land  
 Obesity second only to smoking in causing early death  
 AIDS epidemic over in Australia  
 Warming seas killing our kelp forests, permanently  
 Juno's Jupiter jaunt  
 Ozone hole is healing



Professor Andrew Grulich from the Kirby Institute explains that AIDS in Australia has been virtually eliminated.  
*ABC News, July 2016*

# BOARD MEMBERS

The AusSMC Board, chaired by Peter Yates AM, meets four times a year. Deputy chairs are Robyn Williams from the ABC and Professor Merlin Crossley from UNSW. Board members at 30 June 2017 were:

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

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

Professor Merlin Crossley  
(Deputy Chair)  
*Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
(Education),  
The University of NSW*

Jim Carroll  
*Director of News, Current  
Affairs & Sport, SBS*

John Croll  
*CEO, iSentia*

Professor Karen Day  
*Dean of Science,  
University of Melbourne*

Professor Graham Durant  
*Director, Questacon - The  
National Science and  
Technology Centre*

Harry Efthimiou  
*Chief Health Insurance Officer,  
AIA Australia*

Dr Michael Ellies  
*Media consultant*

Brad Hatch  
*Manager of Communications,  
Fairfax Media*

Professor Judith Smith  
*Dean, Faculty of Science, UTS*

Professor Peter Rathjen  
*Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Tasmania*

Dr Paul Willis  
*Director, RiAus*



Melvin Mansell  
*State Editorial Director, SA,  
WA, NT & Tas,  
News Corp Australia*

Jemimah Pentland  
*Head of Communications  
Asia Pacific,  
CSL Limited*

Fiona McLeod  
*External Affairs Manager,  
Australia Pacific LNG*

Professor Iain Watson  
*Deputy Vice Chancellor  
(External Engagement),  
The University of Queensland*

Huw Morgan  
*Manager, Media Liaison  
CSIRO*

Professor Mary O'Kane  
*NSW Chief Scientist  
and Engineer*

Gordon Radford  
*Executive Partner,  
Johnson Winter & Slattery*

Professor Robert Saint  
*Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
(Research), Flinders University*

Dr Amanda Caples  
*Lead Scientist, Victorian Govt*

The Hon Jay Weatherill  
*Premier,  
Govt of South Australia*

Dr Kieran Kirk  
*Dean, ANU College of  
Science, The Australian  
National University*

## PATRONS

Dr Alan Finkel AO  
*Australia's Chief Scientist  
(National)*

Baroness Professor Susan Greenfield CBE  
*University of Oxford  
(International)*



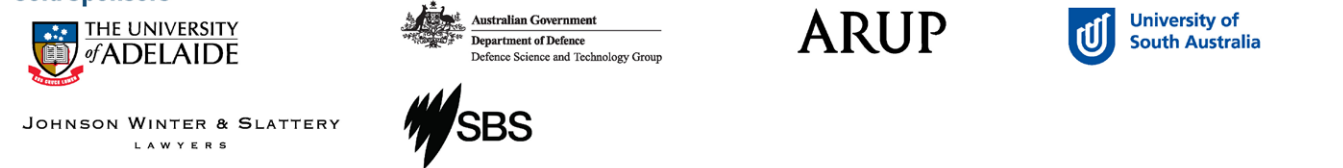
# SPONSORS AND AFFILIATES

All support is capped at 10% of the AusSMC's budget to maintain the Centre's independence.  
The AusSMC is grateful to the following supporters during 2016-17.

## Foundation Sponsors



## Gold Sponsors



## Affiliates



## Supporters



# FINANCIALS

## INCOME

	2017 (\$)	2016 (\$)
Sponsorship received .....	724,218.00	782,343.00
Project funds .....	221,779.00	31,689.00
Affiliation funds .....	173,751.00	153,551.00
Cost recovery .....	8,896.00	15,356.00
Other income .....	<u>15,798.00</u>	<u>19,191.00</u>
	1,144,442.00	1,002,130.00

## OTHER INCOME

Interest received .....	10,289.00	11,675.00
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## TOTAL INCOME

1,154,731.00 1,013,805.00

## EXPENDITURE

Salaries and wages .....	670,034.00	720,108.00
Project expenses .....	253,073.00	105,302.00
Briefings .....	7,003.00	13,103.00
Office expenses .....	86,446.00	90,188.00
Board meeting expenses .....	8,160.00	11,641.00
Depreciation .....	5,863.00	8,082.00
Travel expenses .....	25,773.00	30,102.00
Marketing and development costs .....	<u>2,859.00</u>	<u>6,243.00</u>

## TOTAL EXPENDITURE

1,059,211.00 985,246.00

Surplus .....	95,520.00	28,559.00
Other comprehensive income .....	-----	-----
Total comprehensive surplus for the year .....	95,520.00	28,559.00
Retained surplus at the beginning of the financial year .....	<u>194,329.00</u>	<u>155,770.00</u>
Transfer from reserves .....	-	10,000.00
Transfer to reserves .....	(45,000.00)	-
Retained surplus at the end of the financial year .....	244,849.00	194,329.00



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