



# Queensland Protein Group

## History

Ross Smith from the University of Queensland (UQ) was the driving force behind establishing the Queensland Protein Group (QPG) in 1987, when he took on the task of Director of the Brisbane Centre for Protein and Nucleic Acid Research. This centre was set up primarily by Burt Zerner with some input from the then Head of Biochemistry at UQ, Brian Shanley. It was a joint initiative of Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR), UQ and Griffith University (GU) and incorporated some early protein equipment, including a protein sequencer and peptide and oligonucleotide synthesisers. The inaugural QPG meeting, which attracted 30-40 people, was held at QIMR and organised by Ross Smith and Alan Saul (QIMR). A committee was elected and included Ross Smith as Chair, Grahame Lloyd-Jones (QIMR), Frank Clarke (GU) and Terry Walsh (Queensland University of Technology – QUT; QIT at that stage). There were typically three meetings a year of 50-75 people, each followed by a BBQ. These meetings were extremely popular and were noted for several inaugural lectures, including that of Vicki Sara, later head of the ARC, upon her return to Australia. The vibrancy of the group owed much to the enthusiasm of Frank Clarke, Simon Brown, Ross Tellam, Greg Harper, Paul Kroon, Gene Wijffels and Bob Blakeley, as well as a host of institutional researchers and students. At a December meeting each year, students put up posters, with some selected to present talks, and the best received industry-sponsored prizes. There were also several 2-3 day conferences in the first few years, which became the forerunner of the East Coast Protein Meetings (ECPM). The first few ECPMs all reached 100 participants, the limit of the venue at Byron Bay (Club Med – not a 5-star venue at the time).



*ECPM poster session at Byron Bay, 1998.  
Photo courtesy of Terry Walsh.*

Terry Walsh took over as Chair in 1994. QPG took on a more active role in two areas: specifically themed meetings, where new techniques or areas of breakthrough science were highlighted, often with keynote speakers from around the nation or overseas; and developmental conferences for students, where they could present orally, a mode of presentation not available in many large

conferences. The Christmas meeting became synonymous with student-led orals, with strong support from major biological supply companies and Sustaining Members of ASBMB for valuable cash prizes and certificates. The ECPM evolved into a regular, jointly organized effort with the Sydney Protein Group (SPG), with each group alternating responsibility for the organisation, and providing the opportunity for students to present their work in oral format alongside keynote speakers from around Australia and overseas. This meeting eventually outgrew the Byron Bay site and moved to Coffs Harbour's Opal Cove Resort.



*Prize drawing at the Student Research Awards, UQ, Brisbane, 2008. Photo courtesy of Thomas Huber.*

## QPG in the 21st Century

For most of Australia, the major distraction of the Sydney Olympics disrupted lots of regular activities and the ECPM, hosted by SPG that year, was postponed; after 2000, the activities of the group slowed down. In 2002, Bostjan Kobe was brought in to resurrect QPG's activities. The first event in the new QPG era was the Protein Symposium at the Science Queensland event at RNA Showgrounds in Brisbane that year (thanks to the initiative of Alan Lawrenson), followed by the ECPM in Coffs Harbour in 2003. Special thanks go to Terry Walsh, Tamarind Hamwood, Sarah Kruger, Ylva Strandberg and Carmel Walsh for making this meeting a success again. The ECPM now continues to be a regular biannual event of QPG and SPG, providing opportunities for oral presentations by students and junior postdocs. Sarah Kruger produced the QPG logo in conjunction with the 2003 ECPM.

The main events supported by QPG 2002-2007 were:

- ECPM, Coffs Harbour, 27-29 June 2003
- Protein Crystallisation Workshop, UQ, 3 November 2004
- Nuclear Transport Symposium, UQ, 14 April 2005
- ECPM, Coffs Harbour, 25-26 June 2005 (organisation led by SPG)
- Queensland Protein Expression Symposium, UQ, 24 November 2005
- ECPM, Coffs Harbour, 12-14 July 2007
- Queensland Protein Expression Symposium, UQ, 22-23 November 2007

QPG also sponsored other activities, including the international speaker Eva Pebay-Peyroula at ComBio2006, and the 2007 Boden Conference on 'Disulfide Bonds and their Role in Protein Folding and Function'.



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The most recent event organised by the group was the inaugural 'QPG Student Research Awards' held on 16 June 2008 at UQ, a one-day symposium featuring outstanding Honours and PhD students doing research in protein science. Based on abstract submissions, ten students were invited to give short oral presentations, and the best presenters won travel awards to attend ComBio2008 in Canberra. Thanks to Brett Collins, Thomas Huber and Justine Hill, who were the main organisers of this successful event.

QPG operates under a constitution accepted in 2004. The current committee includes Bostjan Kobe (Chair), Geoff Birrell (Secretary), Jon Harris (Treasurer), Thomas Huber, Justine Hill, Brett Collins, Ross Smith, Mary Marfori, Stacey Scott and Tamarind Hamwood.

## Aims

The aim of the QPG is to facilitate the scientists from academia, hospitals, research institutes and industry in Brisbane and elsewhere in Queensland to hold regular meetings and events enabling discussion and exchange

of expertise, as well as information on the latest research and technology developments in protein science. The following aims are listed in the constitution:

- (a) To encourage, stimulate and foster interest in all aspects of proteins amongst interested persons by:
  - i) The provision of a forum in which research and review papers may be presented for comment, criticism and discussion;
  - ii) The provision of opportunities for meeting others in related fields of interest and discussing matters of common interest.
- (b) To print, publish, issue and circulate such written material as may be conducive to the promotion of the objects of the group.

## Website

The QPG website is maintained by Thomas Huber:  
<http://compbio.chemistry.uq.edu.au/QPG/index.html>

*Ross Smith, Terry Walsh and Bostjan Kobe*