



Australasian Region

# Newsletter

Issue 12  
February 2013

<http://www.BiometricSociety.org.au>

## From the President's desk, David Baird



This is my first newsletter as the incoming President of the Australasian Region of the International Biometric Society, so let me introduce myself. I am an independent statistical consultant based in Christchurch New Zealand, and spend much of my time developing the statistical program GenStat, plus working on contract for a number of NZ companies. Previously, I had worked for AgResearch as a biometrician. I am sure I won't be able to fill the large and flamboyant shoes of Mario (seen in the photo left handing over the presidency at the AASC conference in Queenstown last year), but have been quietly involved in the ABS

for the last 25 years. During this time, I've helped run 3 conferences and been a representative on the International Council. I have just returned from a couple of weeks holiday, both associated with extreme events. At New Year, I had a week on the West Coast of the South Island which had a 1 in 20 year flood. Recently, I had a week in Queensland and participated in another 1 in 20 year flood, so I've had very wet holidays. I probably should have stayed at home, as Christchurch has had the hottest January in 20 years. So I have been significantly unlucky in my choice of holiday locations. Although, about 20 years ago I presented a paper to government on relief policy for farmers after extreme climatic events (after a drought at that time), pointing out the difficulty of defining events as 1 in 20 (the proposed trigger for assistance) when the baseline was moving (e.g. due to climate change). So perhaps the 1 in 20 year events are now just 1 in 4 events and experiencing two large floods (if they were independent events) was not significant at the 5% level.

Living in Christchurch, I've been associated with an even more extreme event, with a 1 in 16000 year earthquake. I've been working with the Earthquake Commission (EQC) helping quantify the costs of damage to residential buildings. Valued, this is the largest project I've been involved in, as I'm currently helping allocate the estimated \$9.5 billion costs of rebuilding between EQC, private insurers and reinsurers using survey methods. The size of the rebuild is such that final costs won't be known for 5-6 years, and so estimates will allow money to be paid up front with a wash up at the end when final costs are known. This project has again demonstrated the value that our profession can have in practical issues. This year is the International Year of Statistics (<http://www.statistics2013.org/>) and the IBS is working in with this event to promote the value of statistics. In light of this I found the article by Bronwyn Harch (Chief, Mathematics, Informatics and Statistics at CSIRO) interesting reading <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC13006>. May I wish all of our members the best for the coming year, and hope you can make significant contributions in your fields of work.

David.

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## **Australasian Region - council**

In 2013, the regional council comprises:

**President:** David Baird (VSN NZ)

**Vice-president:** Mario D'Antuono (Department of Agriculture and Food, WA)

**Secretary:** Patrick Graham (Independent Researcher)

**Treasurer:** Warren Müller (CSIRO)

**Newsletter correspondent:** Sally Galbraith (University of New South Wales)

**Regional website manager:** Hans Hockey (Biometrics Matters)

**IBS Executive Board:** Alan Welsh (Australian National University)

Kerrie Mengersen (Queensland University of Technology)

**IBS Representative Council Members:** David Baird (VSN NZ)

Warren Müller (CSIRO) and one to be elected (see below).

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## **Election of New Australasian member of the IBS Representative Council**

With the election of Alan Welsh to the Executive Board, the region needs a replacement for Alan on the Representative Council. We are pleased to have 6 nominations for this position (Sally Galbraith, Samuel Mueller, Tony Pettitt, Kathy Ruggiero, Ken Russell and You-Gan Wang). It's great to have so many people keen to contribute to the society. The IBS office will shortly be sending all IBS-AR regular and senior retiree members an email for them to vote for their representative. This will contain a link to biographical sketches of the candidates and a web site for a preferential voting system. A preferential system was decided to be the fairest system, given the number of candidates. You must rank all candidates in order of your preference, as no missing values will be tolerated!

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## **Biometrics by the Canals in Mandurah, Western Australia 1-6 December 2013**

The planning for the next Australasian regional meeting of the International Biometric Society, nicknamed 'Biometrics by the Canals' is coming together. This will be held at The Sebel Mandurah Hotel, in the City of Mandurah (about 70 kilometres south of Perth ) in December 2013! For more information on the region and hotel, please see the websites

<http://www.visitmandurah.com/> and  
<http://www.accorhotels.com/gb/hotel-8767-the-sebel-mandurah/index.shtml> .

More details will be posted on our website  
<http://www.BiometricSociety.org.au> soon.

The Local Organising Committee consists of Mario D'Antuono (Chair), Katia Stefanova, Rebecca O'Leary, Warren Muller (Treasurer)



and Hans Hockey (Website).

The Scientific Programme Committee consists of Max Bulsara (Chair), David Baird, Renate Meyer, Brenton Clarke and Nick de Klerk.

If members have someone they would like considered as an invited speaker, could they please email [David Baird](mailto:David.Baird@ibsonline.org) by the end of the month with a suggestion of the speaker and their area of statistics, and this will be taken into consideration.

## Australasian Applied Statistics Conference, Queenstown 2012

I regard this conference as a defacto Biometrics conference, with it having a large overlap between its delegates and those of our membership, so I will take the liberty of reporting on it. It was a great to see many young statisticians attending (Aaron Bryant, a new biometrician has written a report on the next page). The conference also drew a wide range of people (103) from across the globe, with people from Africa, Europe, Asia and America as well as locals. The NZ biometricians dominated, but a large number of Australians were in attendance, helped by 9 being sponsored by the conference funds. With 9 invited speakers, the conference had a great range of talks.

The conference started with workshops, *Mixed Models for Non-Normal Data* by Roger Payne, *Computer Generation of Experimental Designs* by Emlyn Williams et al. and *Modern Applications of Linear Mixed Models in Case Studies* by Brian Cullis and Sue Welham.

The conference encouraged posters, and a large number (20) of excellent posters were presented. A prize for the best poster was awarded to Peter Alspach (Validation of a breeding strategy for selection of machine-harvested raspberries), and Zoé van Havre was runner up (Investigating the number of components in overfitted Gaussian mixture models).

The conference dinner was a highlight, with a great range of excellent food, despite the bad weather obscuring the views from the Skyline Restaurant. The conference website <http://www.aasc2012.com/> contains workshop notes and presentations from the conference. Ruth Butler, along with the LOC (photo top right), did a great job.

The next AASC will be in South Australia (Kangaroo Island?) in 2014 with the LOC being led by Bev Gogel and Olena Kravchuk.



The LOC: Chris Triggs, David Baird, Andrew McLachlan, Yvonne McDiarmid, Duncan Hedderley and Ruth Butler.



The AASC committee organizing the next conference: Roger Payne, Angela Anderson, Bev Gogel, Murray Hannah, Olena Kravchuk and Ruth Butler



Peter Alspach (right) with Marcus Davy and Alasdair Noble



Zoé van Havre (back) showing her poster to Ari Verbyla, Sue Welham and Simon Diffey

## Report on the Australasian Applied Statistics Conference, 2012 Queenstown, NZ

by Aaron Bryant, AgResearch, Dunedin.

The 2012 AASC conference was held in the magnificent locale of Queenstown, which provided a beautiful backdrop to what was a great conference.

This conference gave me a good chance to catch up with old friends, and start to put faces to the names I had read on various manuals and papers. Being a young statistician and attending only my second conference (my first being NZSA the week before) it was more the latter than the former.

It was great to attend the workshop with Roger Payne and learn more about hierarchical general linear models, and also how to use GenStat. The course on Modern Applications of linear mixed models was great and also cleared up for me some of the syntax in ASREML-R, which I have been endeavoring to use in my job.

The talks and posters were both of a very high standard and I came away with a head full of new information and inspired by all the different things other statisticians are doing. There was a broad range of topics to keep things interesting including, mixed models, design, and genetics. There were also good case studies that had you asking yourself questions such as how tall was a 18th century Finn?, or how old can a human get ? or what is the best last name to have if your paper is to be graded alphabetically. I would like to thank the



organizers for allowing me to give my inaugural conference talk in the first session so I could relax and take in everything over the week.

It would seem no conference report is complete without mentioning the food, so here goes. With this conference being held

practically on my back door step, it was great to be taken around the world with the country/continent themed lunches that were provided, we went to Mexico, India, Asia, and Burgers (Presumably America) .

The conference dinner was held in the Skyline Restaurant on Bob's Peak allegedly overlooking Queenstown, unfortunately the clouds did not co-operate, so this claim has yet to be verified. The buffet was magnificent, the only complaint being there were too many great choices.

Thank you to Ruth Butler and her team for organizing such a great conference in an awesome location.



Design session: Chris Brien, Mausumi Bose, Emlyn Williams, Rahul Mukherjee, Roger Payne



High Throughput session: Siva Ganesh, Marcus Davy, Kathy Ruggiero, Kim-Ahn Le Cao, Thomas Lumley



Graham Hepworth MCing the dinner

## **Biometrics Conference**

Members of the region may be interested in the next International Biometric conference coming up:

International Biometric Conference (IBC 2014) 6-11 July, 2014, Florence, Italy

<http://www.ibs-italy.info/>

## **Young Statisticians Conference**

The Young Statisticians Conference for 2013 will be held from 7-8 February 2013 at Trinity College, University of Melbourne. Hosted by SSAI, the theme is "Celebrating significance" and the conference aims to provide a forum for networking and the exchange of information for young and early career statisticians throughout Australia and beyond. Confirmed keynote speakers include Professor Peter Hall (University of Melbourne), Professor Rob Hyndman (Monash University), Professor John Croucher (Macquarie University), and Professor Ray Chambers (University of Wollongong). In addition to the keynote and contributed presentations, the conference will feature a careers session, keynote panel session, conference dinner and closing drinks. Please see <http://www.ysc2013.com> for further details.

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## **2013 Membership Renewals**

On 1 February the treasurer posted the membership renewal notices to all members in Australia and New Zealand, and he has emailed the notices to members in other countries and supporting members. Payment is due on 1 March. Please assist us by making sure you have renewed your membership by this date.

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## **Scholarships for Honours and Masters Students**

The Region wants to attract enthusiastic and talented graduates, or near graduates, in statistics, mathematical statistics, biostatistics, bioinformatics or biometrics, to career paths in biostatistics and biometrics. The society is offering scholarships for suitably qualified students who intend to undertake a fourth or honours year of study, or a Masters degree, in statistics, mathematical statistics, biostatistics, bioinformatics or biometrics.

Scholarships are for one year and are valued at AUD\$1500. Applicants should have completed a third year of a relevant bachelors degree course, or equivalent, with a major in statistics, mathematical statistics, biostatistics, bioinformatics or biometrics, and must have a strong academic record, potential for a career in research, a strong interest in applications of mathematics and statistics to the biosciences, and good communication skills.

The closing date for applications is Friday 1 March 2013. Further information, including application forms, will be available soon at the IBS-AR website:

<http://www.biometrics.org.au/prizes.html>

## **Feedback**

This newsletter was written by David Baird with contributions from various members. Thank you to all for your support. All comments and suggestions are most welcome. Please forward any feedback on the newsletter to [David Baird](#).

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Further AASC photos:

