Australian Academy of Science / Photo; Heidi.


Australian Academy of Science

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The Australian Academy of Science has as its aim to spread scientific knowledge, to establish and to maintain scientific standards in Australia, and to recognise outstanding personal contributions to the advancement of science. The Academy, which celebrates its Silver Jubilee in 1979, was set up under Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth.

Few issues in science in Australia arise without a contribution from the Academy as the only Australian body able to speak for natural science as a whole. While members of the Academy are few, its work touches many segments of Australian society.

Its members, 182 Fellows, are elected for their pre-eminence in science, and include many of those involved in the most exciting scientific developments in Australia. They come from universities, research institutes, industry and the CSIRO.

By its scientific reports on such topics as Supersonic Transport, Use of DDT, Diet and Coronary Heart Disease, Food Additives, Climatic Change, Offshore Resources, Transport, and Effects of Noise, it provides independent information of a high quality to government and the community on problems raised by technology and present-day developments in society. Studies on harnessing solar energy and the feasibility of using icebergs towed from Antarctica to provide fresh water for dry parts of Australia are aimed at contributing to the future development of Australia.

Leaders of science, industry, government and other parts of the community join in the Academy's Science & Industry Forum to explore ways in which science and industry can benefit the nation's development. Hundreds of scientists give their services freely to help achieve the aims of the Academy by contributing to its scientific enquiries, working groups, and in the preparation of its many publications.

Many other scientists have participated in the scientific conferences organised in Australia by the Academy in the past twenty years. School teachers and school children know the Academy for its senior secondary course "Biological Science: The Web of Life", developed and published by the Academy. This is now a standard text which has revolutionised the teaching of biology in all states of Australia.

The Academy is a focal point in Australia for international activity in science. The International Geophysical Year, which, in 1957, saw the launching of the first satellites and the crossing of Antarctica, is one example. The more recent International Biological Programme and the present Global Weather Experiment, a major international collaborative scientific enterprise, which started in December 1978 and which will provide vastly improved understanding of weather systems, follow in the same pattern.

The exchange of visiting groups of scientists from China and Australia, and the start of similar exchange visits with Japan, are among the Academy's other contributions to Australia's role in international science.

The Academy, an independent organisation, receives finances from its own efforts, from private sources, and from Government.

The massive 44-m concrete and copper dome of the Australian Academy of Science in Canberra brought Canberra's architecture into the twentieth century when it was built in 1959. Designed by Sir Roy Grounds, the form derives from the semi-circular site and the rounded hills of the valley of Canberra. To some, the building also has the science-fiction look of a space ship from some other planet.

The wide overhang of the dome with its arches was adopted to control Canberra's brilliant natural daylight. The 16 points of the dome rest on the base of the reflecting pool which forms a moat surrounding the building.

The building is the home and meeting place of the Academy of Science and the hub of its many activities throughout Australia.

Photo: Heidi

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