



# Actinomycetes, the millennium bugs: in Melbourne for the 13th International Symposium on the Biology of Actinomycetes

The 13th International Symposium on the Biology of Actinomycetes was held at the Melbourne Convention Centre from 1-5 December 2003. The Conference welcomed 355 participants from over 35 countries, with the excellent support of the Government of Victoria. In particular, Dr Amanda Caples, Director of Biotechnology for the State Government of Victoria was very supportive throughout the event. The Honorable Matt Viney, Parliamentary Secretary of the Victorian Government for the Innovation and Industry, Department of Industry Innovation and Regional Development, formally opened the Conference.

This was the first ISBA Meeting in the southern hemisphere and provided colleagues from the northern hemisphere with opportunities to encounter the work of the Actinomycetologists in this part of the world. It has also paved the way towards the establishment of the Australian-New Zealand Actinomycete Group (ANZAG).

The impressive programme included the 'hot topics' in the field, including genomics, proteomics and bioinformatics, as well as the application of the Actinomycetes in biotechnology, biodiscovery and biobusiness. It also included the clinically important Actinomycetes, the molecular aspects of antibiotic resistance as well as alternative therapies. The use of Actinomycetes in environmental biotechnologies such as bioremediation was also discussed.

ISBA'13 was followed by a workshop entitled *Commercial use of microbial diversity* organised by the World Federation of Culture Collections (WFCC). This timely event coincided with both the Australian Federal and State Governments' support initiatives to map Australian biodiversity (including microorganisms)



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and explore their potential biotechnological applications.

Throughout the Conference and the post-conference workshop, recent advances in the natural products screening programmes as well as eco-taxonomical aspects of Actinomycete natural products were the subject of discussions. This is a topic of great importance in the Oceania region, which contains unique microbial diversity in both its marine and terrestrial environments. The event, therefore, was the start of an exciting opportunity in Oceania both to make important contributions to the field of drug discovery through the acquisition and screening of this biota and to attract international partners.

ISBA Conferences have been in existence since 1968 and live on traditions. It has a strong, passionate bond that endures; this is typical among researchers working in the same scientific field. The International Actinomycete Group contains many eminent scientists including Sir Prof David Hopwood, Prof

Julian Davies, Prof Stanley Cohen, Prof Alan Bull and Prof Michael Goodfellow. The traditions they have set up have continued over the years.

At this Conference, past achievements were honoured and awards, in the memory of those who have contributed to the field but not with us any longer, were presented for the best post-graduate students. These were the Prof Tom Cross Award in Ecology, the Prof Marion Mordarski Award in Biotechnology, the Prof Yurii V Dudnik Award in Antibiotic Production, the Prof Bruna Petrolini Award in Plant Pathology and the Dr George Leudemann Award in Biodiscovery. Dr Leudemann's family travelled from the USA to present the award – this was one of the most touching moments of the Conference. Dr Leudemann, who discovered the antibiotic Gentamicin, was also an expert on the ecology of the genus *Geodermatophilus*.

Melbourne, the biotechnology capital of Australia, provided an excellent meeting place for all these eminent scientists. With strong local government support for science, technology and research, and a large biotechnology workforce, it made an ideal venue for the first southern hemisphere encounter – it has been another ISBA which will be remembered for long years to come.

*The conference was proudly sponsored by:*

- The University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia
- GRDC, Australia
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