The 8th Australasian Virology Society (AVS) Meeting was held 6–9 December 2015 in the Hunter Valley, NSW. This student-orientated, biennial conference was organised and hosted by the AVS Local Organising Committee. The 2015 AVS Meeting was held consecutively with the 11th National Scientific Workshop Australian Centre for HIV and Hepatitis Virology Research (ACH2) Meeting. The ACH2 conference followed AVS, running 9–11 December in the same venue. This successful joint AVS and ACH2 meeting allowed many delegates to seamlessly attend the back-to-back conferences without additional travel. Both meetings were held in the Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley Resort in Lovedale. All conference facilities were onsite, set amongst the accommodation, enabling continuous networking opportunities throughout the conference duration.

The AVS conference was attended by 215 delegates with students comprising 32% of attendees. The ACH2 conference had 112 registered attendees and 43 researchers went to both conferences. For the AVS meeting, international conference delegates made up 7% of the attendance register, while the largest proportion of Australian attendees came from Victoria (35%), followed by Queensland (24%), then New South Wales (21%), and the remaining 13% of combined delegates travelled from Western Australia, Australian Capital Territory and South Australian states.

A balanced AVS meeting programme showcased a wide range of topics across the four day conference, maintaining both interest and energy from the diverse audience. These included sessions focused on: immunity and immune invasion, viral immunology, viral pathogenesis, new and emerging viruses, therapeutics, viral replication, RNA and viruses, viral epidemiology, diagnostics and insect antiviral immunity.

Invited international speakers included; Professor Jonathan Yewdell (USA), Professor Carla Saleh (France) and Associate Professor Marco Weinberg. National speakers included; Professor Mariapia Degli Esposti, Associate Professor David Tschurke, Professor Cheryl Jones, Professor Eddie Holmes, Associate Professor David Harrich, Professor Alex Khromykh, Professor Damian Purcell, Professor Bill Rawlinson, Associate Professor Heidi Drummer and Associate Professor Paul Cameron. For the ACH2 meeting, the invited international speakers were Associate Professor Vincente Planelles and Associate Professor Andrea Cox.

The ‘Oral Poster’ sessions offered a novel AVS presentation format, specifically aimed to encourage and develop students and early career researchers (ECRs) in conference presentations. These sessions were exciting, high tension and held at the end of each of the full conference days. The condensed talks were strictly limited to six slides delivered within six minutes. These lively sessions proved to be both popular and well received.

The AVS meeting also offered a ‘Meet the Professors’ lunch event, where delegates, particularly students and ECRs, could meet the keynote speakers in a relaxed setting. This popular event was organised by Dr Sacha Stelzer-Braid, POWH and ran for an hour and a half in a small group situation, to promote dialogue between ECRs and experts, encouraging questions and insights into their career experience. This enlightening and intimate lunch allowed a unique opportunity for ECRs to benefit from expert mentorship and make connections with leaders in their chosen field.

The meeting concluded with an outstanding joint conference dinner at the spectacular Hope Estate Vineyard. The evening commenced with a networking session over canapés, followed by a formal dinner, prize giving, speeches and dancing, with live music from the pianist and singer Dan Beazley. This event enabled further networking in a more relaxed setting and was graced by a spectacular lightning storm, providing an excellent visual backdrop to the event, over the wine yards.

Overall, the 8th AVS Meeting was rated as ‘excellent’ by the vast majority in feedback surveys, confirming the event’s success. Special thanks go out to the Local Organising Committee, members from the AVS Committee, also Maree Overall and Kara Taglieri from ASN and finally Tony Cunningham and Denise Brown (ACH2) for assistance in ensuring this event was a success.