



Editorial

Sad news dominated the Australian mathematical scene in recent months with the loss of three of its most illustrious members. Past AustMS president George Szekeres and his wife Esther Szekeres-Klein passed away on August the 28th, and former ANZIAM (then Applied Division of the AustMS) chairman Ren Potts lost his battle with illness on the 9th of August. Their respective obituaries, written by Michael Cowling and Ernie Tuck, may be found elsewhere in this Gazette.

We are pleased that the Hon. Brendan Nelson, MP has taken up our invitation to write a column in the **Math matters** series. The Minister notes that Australian primary and secondary school students perform well against international standards, but expresses his concern about the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students. The Australian Government has introduced an initiative which aims to improve literacy and numeracy standards in the crucial middle years of schooling, the Australian Schools Innovation in Science, Technology and Mathematics (ASISTM) Project. ASISTM is already achieving unprecedented collaboration between Australia's schools and universities. The Minister further acknowledges that

“If we are to be effective in our teaching of mathematics at all levels of schooling we need to ensure that our universities are attracting and generating enough mathematical sciences graduates to meet our current and future needs for maths teachers and for other careers where maths skills are essential.”

The previous editorial already mentioned the Research Quality Framework (RQF) that is heading for our shores. The Australian Government recently released a discussion paper entitled “The RQF Preferred Model” for an upcoming research assessment. Given the profound impact the RQF will have on mathematics departments and many individual research mathematicians, and given our less than enviable position on the bibliometric scoring board, it is vital we all lobby for an RQF that serves the interests of mathematics and that provides a healthy environment for mathematics in Australian. A detailed analysis of the current state of affairs, and a call to arms is made by Peter Hall later in this issue. Note that in his **Math matters** column, the Hon. Brendan Nelson remarks that lower publication and citation rates in the mathematical sciences compared to other sciences will not be used as evidence against the mathematics discipline.

For some time now we have been scratching our heads as to how we can sell mathematics to the world. Perhaps we may find the answer in Andrew Conway's **brilliant career**, offering a rare concession to the benefits of the Dilbert dark side, and expressing a sympathy towards good salespeople, marketeers, accountants, lawyers and administrators.

Playing with soap bubbles is an all-time favourite, and provides great entertainment in a course on minimal surfaces. It allows lecturers and students alike to relive their childhood years under the pretext of doing mathematics. The mathematics of minimal surfaces also

offers some intriguing and deep mysteries. One such mystery, the Lawson Conjecture, is chosen by Paul Norbury as **The 12th problem**.

If you thought SUDOKU was addictive, then wait till Norman Do takes you on a guided tour of SET in **Mathellaneous**. Set theory may be one of the less sexy areas of mathematics, but Norman transforms what may first seem a damp blanket into a delectable dish.

Finally we thank Chris Harman for his time as local correspondent at the University of Southern Queensland and welcome his successor Sergey Suslov.