



# President's column

**Peter Hall\***

I would like to use this brief column, my final one as President, to thank some of the many people who have assisted me, or helped Australian mathematics, during the last 26 months. First I must thank Liz Billington, who as Secretary of the Society is the person responsible for keeping things moving. Without her remarkable vigilance, insight and attention to detail, and the continuity and corporate memory that she provides through the tenure of many presidents, our operations would quickly unravel.

Our Treasurer, Algy Howe, has helped guide us through turbulent financial times, and supported initiatives to place some of our reserves into the care of a major Australian university, for investment at a rate of return that we could not ensure on our own. At the time of writing, the details of this proposal were still being worked out, but the Steering Committee has already had discussions with the university's financial officer and been impressed by the opportunities.

Birgit Loch and Rachel Thomas, editors of the *Gazette*, have helped disseminate news throughout my term. Birgit had sole responsibility for the *Gazette* while Rachel was on maternity leave. This period coincided with substantial upheaval and trauma at the University of Southern Queensland, where Birgit works, and she must have wondered on many occasions how she could possibly keep the *Gazette* on track. But on track it stayed. We're very grateful to you, Birgit.

The Canberra office, and most of all May Truong, worked hard to ensure that the introduction of our new website was as smooth and as timely as possible. Thanks to May's efforts you should be able to pay your 2009 subscriptions online, rather than by mail. I owe a substantial debt to Ross Moore, too, for all his efforts in this regard. Without his expert knowledge, and the considerable time he spent liaising with our website designer, the design would have been both less effective and less timely.

Our journal editors, Michael Cowling (the *Journal*), Charles Pearce (the *ANZIAM Journal*) and Don Taylor (the *Bulletin*), worked hard to make the transfer of publication to Cambridge University Press as trouble-free as possible. I should add that Michael also played a leading role in this development before I became president, and so the smoothness of the transition owes a great deal to his input over several years.

The CUP contacts made by Cheryl Praeger, editor of the Society's *Lecture Series*, which has been published by CUP for some time, also helped the transition. I'm grateful too for Cheryl raising the profile of Australian mathematics through her work on the IMU Executive Committee. The IMU intervened very constructively

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in our dispute with USQ over the fate of that university's mathematics program. The intervention was of substantial benefit; for example, it gave the dispute a higher media profile.

The ANZIAM Chairs, Peter Taylor up until last February and subsequently Phil Howlett, have been particularly supportive. I especially remember the help that ANZIAM gave during the journal-ranking debate, drawing up a comprehensive comparison of the previous and the ARC rankings (here Jim Denier deserves special thanks) and helping to ensure that our communications with members around the country, and with the ARC, were as smooth and constructive as possible.

The Society's Steering Committee and Council, particularly Vice-Presidents Mathai Varghese and Ole Waarner, have also been very helpful with advice and assurance. Sometimes we've called on them for quick comments or approval, and they have always risen to the occasion. Mathai has worked tirelessly to ensure that our conferences, and the Mahler Lecture series, run smoothly.

Many other members of the Society, not just those who are members of the Society's Executive or our committees, have given sterling service to Australian mathematics during the last two years. If I may I'd like to single out Hyam Rubinstein, Terry Tao and Jan Thomas for special mention. Hyam, Chair of the National Committee for the Mathematical Sciences, and Jan, AMSI's Executive Officer, have been responsible for more than a few submissions to the federal government's many reviews of the higher education sector, and also for submissions to other reviews relating to mathematics in Australia. (I gather that there are currently some 140 reviews, initiated by the Rudd government, under way.) Hyam also played a leading role during the journal-ranking debate, calling together the National Committee's subcommittees to oversee the re-ranking process. Terry Tao gave, and continues to give, extraordinary assistance to us all, not just in the context of the dispute with USQ but much more generally. His capacity for working fast, accurately and constructively, at a high level and in large quantity, still astounds me.

I could mention many others. However, Birgit and Rachel would not thank me for taking up any more space in the *Gazette*, which under their editorship is receiving many submissions. Therefore let me close with a simple 'welcome' to Nalini Joshi, who will assume the Presidency in December and who will, I'm sure, take the Society to greater heights during the next two years. Nalini's many talents, particularly her tremendous capacity for organisation and for cutting to the heart of any issue, will be of great benefit to us all. Many challenges lie ahead, many of them unpredictable, before the mathematical sciences can be restored to their rightful position of strength in Australia.



Peter Hall is a statistician, with interests in a variety of areas of science and technology (particularly the physical sciences and engineering). He got his first degree from The University of Sydney in 1974, his MSc from The Australian National University in 1976, and his DPhil from University of Oxford in the same year. Peter is interested in a wide variety of things, from current affairs to railways and cats.