



NCMS News

Peter Forrester*

I have taken over the role as Chair of the National Committee for the Mathematical Sciences as of April this year. The outgoing Chair Professor Nalini Joshi has been responsible for a number of transformational initiatives, as brought about by her tireless advocacy for the role of the Mathematical Sciences in securing Australia's future, and her active addressing of the under-representation of women in our discipline. It's great to see that her efforts have been recognised by being a recipient of the 2015 Australian Financial Review and Westpac 100 Women of Influence Award, being named as one of the inaugural Knowledge Society and the Office of the Chief Scientist 'Knowledge Nation 100' ('STEM heroes' category), her appearance on Q&A, her recent address to the National Press Club, amongst other public honours.

Nalini initiated the Australian Academy of Science Decadal Plan, by raising funds to support the process, formulating a structure to proceed and remaining throughout as one of the three members of the Decadal Plan Steering Committee, chaired by the late Professor Peter Hall, another champion of Australian Mathematical Sciences. The decadal plan was launched at Parliament House on 17 March. Ironically, due to a family bereavement Nalini was not able to attend, and her role for the occasion was replaced by Professor Cheryl Praeger. Also present at the launch was Peter Hall's widow Jeannie.

There's no doubt that there was a lot of good will shown by the high ranking politicians present at the launch: Education Minister Birmingham and assistant Science Minister Andrews. In particular, one of the three key priorities listed in the report, that there be a staged reintroduction of at least Year 12 intermediate level mathematics as a prerequisite for all bachelors programs in science, engineering and commerce, seemed to be well aligned with present government policy, as was point 1 from a vision for 2025: 'The mathematical sciences are critically important for Australia's future, especially in light of ongoing technological change'. The latter of these was a point consistently made by Professor Ian Chubb, in his role as Chief Scientist.

The report asks the National Committee for the Mathematical Sciences to formally monitor the progress on the plan. Professor Geoff Prince of AMSI, one the Decadal Plan Steering Committee members, has already taken initiatives on implementa-

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tion by arranging for a number of senior people to participate in a meeting with Ian Chubb, both to formally thank him for his efforts in advancing the causes of the Mathematical Sciences during his tenure as Chief Scientist, and furthermore to seek his council relating to strategies to work with government.



Peter Forrester received his Doctorate from the Australian National University in 1985, and held a postdoctoral position at Stony Brook before joining La Trobe University as a lecturer in 1987. In 1994 he was awarded a senior research fellowship by the ARC, which he took up at The University of Melbourne. Peter's research interests are broadly in the area of mathematical physics, and more particularly in random matrix theory and related topics in statistical mechanics. This research and its applications motivated the writing of a large monograph *Log-gases and Random Matrices* (PUP, Princeton) which took place over a fifteen-year period. His research has been recognised by the award of the Medal of the Australian Mathematical Society in 1993, and election to the Australian Academy of Science in 2004, in addition to several ARC personal fellowships. He was AustMS President from 2012 to 2014.