



# Communications

## Remembering David Widdup

Jan Thomas\*

Dr David Widdup was the inaugural Executive Director of the Federation of Australian Science and Technological Societies (FASTS), now Science and Technology Australia (STA), and played a critical role in its success. For a number of reasons there has been little recognition of his contribution. In an attempt to address that I have worked with others to document his contribution to FASTS. See: <http://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/DW26july.pdf>.



Photo: Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives

In searching for material for his contribution to FASTS, I was reminded again of his enormous contribution to the mathematical sciences. David's background was in mathematics and mathematics education and there is little doubt that, as FASTS Executive Director, it was an area where he spent a disproportionate amount of time. I commend the Appendix in the document referenced above. It is an address by David to the July 1989 AustMS meeting. Note in particular his comments on teacher supply (page 1) and concluding comments on the need for communication (page 3). With David's support and encouragement, the Australian Mathematical Sciences Council (AMSC) under the FASTS umbrella was formed shortly after. This gave the mathematical sciences a collaborative voice backed by a much broader scientific body.

In the early years of FASTS and AMSC, the mathematical sciences learnt how to have a political voice. For example, the first major forum organised by AMSC

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in 1991, with much behind the scenes help from David, had an impressive list of speakers. They included politicians and people from industry and it was the forerunner of the many held since by AMSC, the National Committee to reinforce the message of Reviews in 1996, 2006 and 2016 and the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI). While the AMSC was eventually wound up, by then AMSI was established and now provides robust advocacy for all areas of the discipline.

If David had not collaborated with Garth Gaudry and others to form the AMSC it is unlikely that I could have had the role I had with FASTS and AustMS. The paper I wrote in 2000 (<https://www.austms.org.au/AustMath/lookfuture.pdf>) had a huge influence on the decision by the Victorian government to fund AMSI and the subsequent support from Brendan Nelson that established the Summer School and the International Centre of Excellence for Education in Mathematics (ICE-EM). The impact of that paper was very much tied to the fact that it was published by FASTS and therefore seen as an issue for the broader science community, not just the mathematical community.

David's premature death was a tragedy. It would be compounded if we did not remember his contribution to what the mathematical sciences have today.

#### *Postscript*

In the period prior to, and after, David leaving FASTS many of us felt helpless to assist him through a difficult period in his life. There are many services now available that weren't then. Those messages that appear on our screens with numbers to call are for all of us to use, especially if we suspect someone is a suicide risk.



Jan Thomas OAM is a graduate of the University of Adelaide (Science Honours) and La Trobe (DipEd and BEd TESOL). She was a teachers and education consult for the Victorian Education Department before joining the Faculty of Education at what is now Victoria University. While there she became part-time Executive Officer for the AustMS and Vice-President of FASTS. As she prepared to retire, she joined with Professor Tony Guttman to write the business plan for AMSI. When this was successful she became Executive Officer for AMSI. She eventually retired in March 2011 and is now a Senior Fellow at The University of Melbourne and has an office at AMSI.