

Feature Article

Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists and Molecular Biologists Incorporated (FAOBMB Inc.): A Brief History

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FOUNDATION

The Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists (FAOB) was jointly founded on 1 August 1972 by the Australian Biochemical Society, the Society of Biological Chemists (India) and the Japanese Biochemical Society to promote the development of biochemistry in the Asian and Pacific Region. The first Executive Committee comprised Edwin C. Webb (President, Australia), Takashi Murachi (Vice-President, Japan), and N. R. Mougald (Secretary-General, India).

The Federation became officially incorporated as a tax-exempt association (FAOB Inc.) in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia on 8 December 1992 and undertook a change in name to Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists and Molecular Biologists (FAOBMB) Incorporated on 7 December 1993. FAOBMB is an Associate Organization of the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB), with which it actively collaborates. The Federation's logo, adopted in 1989 and modified in 1993 to include the change in name, reflects the dynamic nature of the FAOBMB and the continual flow of information of biochemistry between members, which consists of countries in both the Asian and Pacific region.

Since the founding of FAOBMB, biochemistry and molecular biology have grown in importance not only as a focus of the health sciences but also as the basis of the biotechnology industry. It is doubtful if the original founders could have foreseen this rapid growth but they were correct in believing that many biochemists and molecular biologists in the Asia-Pacific region would benefit substantially from improved communication and collaborations between members and the encouragement of young scientists.

MEMBERSHIP

FAOBMB is probably one of the first scientific associations focused solely on the Asian-Pacific region which has become such an important force in the world economy. Its membership grew rapidly, and by 1986, FAOBMB had 16 Constituent Members, some formed as Groups rather than full-fledged Societies, so undoubtedly FAOBMB has played an important catalytic role in stimulating the association of biochemists in countries of our region. Presently, FAOBMB has 20 Constituent Members (Table 1) representing more than 20,000 biochemists, constituting a sizable fraction of the total biochemists in the world.

The membership of FAOBMB spans very large distances geographically, and covers not only a range of ethnic groups but also a wide spectrum in academic capability and manpower resources. For example, the largest society has some 10,000 biochemists and has been in existence for more than 60 years, while the smallest groups have only 10–20 members and have been in existence for less than 10 years.

ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

The affairs of the Federation are conducted by a Council represented by one delegate from each Constituent Member. Since Council can usually meet once a year, an Executive Committee is elected to act for the Federation between meetings of the Council. The Executive Committee are also members of the Council and currently consist of President, Secretary-General, Treasurer and President-Elect or Immediate Past President. Past and present office bearers of FAOB/FAOBMB are listed in Table 2. Others responsible for specific jobs include the Chairperson of the Fellowships Committee, the Chairperson of the Education Committee, Archivist, and the Public Officer (who provides reports on FAOBMB to the State of Victoria, Australia as part of the requirements for

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Table 1
Current constituent members of FAOBMB

1.	Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
2.	Bangladesh Biochemical Society
3.	Chinese Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
4.	Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, located in Taipei, China
5.	Hawaiian Biochemists Group
6.	Hong Kong Biochemical Association
7.	Society of Biological Chemists (India)
8.	Indonesian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
9.	Iranian Biochemistry Society
10.	Japanese Biochemical Society
11.	Biochemical Society of the Republic of Korea
12.	Malaysian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
13.	Myanmar Biochemists Group
14.	Nepal Molecular Biology Society
15.	New Zealand Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
16.	Pakistan Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
17.	Philippine Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
18.	Singapore Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
19.	Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Section of the Science Society of Thailand
20.	Biochemists Group of the Viet Nam Universities and Pedagogical Institutes

Table 2
Past and present office bearers of FAOB/FAOBMB

<i>Presidents</i>			
Edwin C. Webb	Australia		1972–1974
A. W. Linnane	Australia		1975–1977
Katzumoto Imahori	Japan		1978–1980
Osamu Hayaishi	Japan		1981–1983
B. K. Bacchawat	India		1984–1986
Takashi Murachi	Japan		1987–1989
Jisunon Svasti	Thailand		1990–1992
N.V. Bhagavan	Hawaii		1993–1995
Yasuhiro Anraku	Japan		1996–1998
William H Sawyer	Australia		1999–2001
Qi-shui Lin	China		2002–2004
Kyung-Soo Hahm	Korea		2005–2007
<i>Secretaries-General</i>			
N. R. Mougdal	India		1972–1975
Takashi Murachi	Japan		1976*
Mervyn Smith	New Zealand		1977–1979
Fyfe L. Bygrave	Australia		1980–1987
Kay Hoon Lee	Singapore		1988–1993
Lin Qi-shui	China		1994–1999
Khoo Hoon Eng	Singapore		2000–2005
John de Jersey	Australia		2006–
<i>Treasurers</i>			
Serene Vimokesant	Thailand		1977–1980
Jisunon Svasti	Thailand		1980–1986
N.V. Bhagavan	Hawaii		1987–1992
Yasuhiro Anraku	Japan		1993–1995
Si Myung Byun	Korea		1996–1998
Kiyoshi Kita	Japan		1999–

*The office was Secretary-General/Treasurer.

incorporation). When necessary, *ad hoc* committees are appointed for particular tasks.

Constituent Members pay annual subscription fees: the subscription system is rather unusual in that societies can elect to pay different amounts per head for each member in the society, dependent upon its financial status. The subscription rate has no bearing on voting rights, since each society has one vote in Council. Another source of income, apart from occasional donations, is interest from Endowments: these are mainly used to sponsor plenary lectureships at FAOBMB Congresses, namely the Murachi Memorial Lecture, the Kunio Yagi Lecture and the Jisunon Svasti Lecture. In addition, the Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and the Society for Biological Chemists (India) sponsor plenary lectures at some FAOBMB meetings – the ASBMB Lecturer and the Ramachandran Lecturer, respectively.

As an Associated Organization, FAOBMB also receives a triennial budget from IUBMB to assist in the support of

symposia and congresses. Since 1999, the FAOBMB President has been an observer at IUBMB Executive Meetings, and the President of IUBMB has been an observer at FAOBMB Council Meetings. This arrangement has greatly improved communication and coordination between the two organizations.

The Federation also permits organizations and companies, interested in its objectives, to become Special Members. Special Members have provided important support for the Federation financially and in other ways.

CONGRESSES AND SYMPOSIA

The initial activities of FAOBMB during the first four years were limited to partial sponsorship of a few international symposia being held in member countries. FAOBMB began sponsoring its own meetings in 1977, co-hosted by a local society or group. FAOBMB Congresses, held triennially, and FAOBMB Symposia, held in intervening years, now constitute

the major scientific activity of the Federation. The FAOBMB Congresses are now at a very high scientific level, and are accepted as major events in the biochemical calendar of the region, attended by 1,000–2,000 participants. FAOBMB Symposia tend to be somewhat more variable in character, depending upon the strength and location of the host organization, and have an attendance of about 200–300 participants. Since 1997, a Biochemical Education Workshop, jointly sponsored by FAOBMB and IUBMB, has been a major feature of annual meetings. Occasionally, support has been given to other Symposia or Workshops in the region, and although little may be provided financially, both the organizers and FAOBMB benefit as co-sponsors: meetings receiving this kind of support have been held in Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand and Pakistan.

Recent agreement between FAOBMB and IUBMB ensures that whenever an IUBMB International Congress is held in the Asian-Pacific region, it will be held jointly with the FAOBMB Congress. To this end, the triennial Congress schedules of both organizations are now synchronized. Consequently, the international congresses to be held in Kyoto in 2006 and in Shanghai in 2009 will be joint IUBMB-FAOBMB International Congresses of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

FELLOWSHIPS

Activities involving young scientists involve Travel Fellowships and Research Fellowships. Numerous Travel Fellowships have now been awarded for attendance at FAOBMB Congresses and Symposia, providing opportunities for young scientists with limited financial resources to become exposed to the atmosphere of an international meeting. Moreover such fellowships provide the opportunity to learn about work that is being done and to meet with scientists in other areas of the Asian and Pacific region. For many, it may represent the first time that they have the opportunity of attending an overseas meeting, undoubtedly leaving a lasting impression. Research Fellowships are designed to assist young scientists in spending a few weeks in another laboratory within the FAOBMB region to learn specific techniques which would be useful for their research at home: due to the lack of funds few have thus far been awarded. More recently, a generous endowment from Professor Yasuhiro Anraku has established Young Scientist Awards to allow two talented young researchers to present their work at FAOBMB Congresses. The first awards

will be presented at the joint IUBMB-FAOBMB Congress in Kyoto.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Over the 30 years since its foundation, FAOBMB has undoubtedly had a major impact on biochemistry and molecular biology in the Asian and Pacific region. The membership structure of FAOBMB, like that of IUBMB, where the members are the societies within the region, rather than renowned individuals in each country, has helped FAOBMB achieve grass-roots support from the biochemists in the region. In addition, the one society-one vote system, irrespective of memberships fees paid, has created a sense of involvement of all societies, providing the opportunity for smaller and lesser developed societies to host FAOBMB meetings and their members to play leadership roles in the Executive Committee. FAOBMB activities, such as the Congresses, Symposia, Travel Fellowships, Research Fellowships, and Biochemical Education sessions have benefited large numbers of biochemists throughout the region. FAOBMB attempted to increase revenue and obtain greater worldwide exposure worldwide through establishment of its own journal, the *Journal of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Biophysics* (JBMBB), under the leadership of Ikuo Yamashina as Editor-in-Chief, and Richard Guillory as Managing Editor. But these were difficult times in which to establish a scientific journal, and JBMBB had to be discontinued in 2002. Greater efforts will be required to find other sources of income, such as from Special Membership support. Most importantly, the Executive Committee and Council Delegates must continue to work together to build on past accomplishments, and strengthen biochemistry and molecular biology in the Asian and Pacific region for future generations.

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