Leann Tilley, FAOBMB Representative, reports on the FAOBMB Congress and Council Meeting held in Hyderabad, India, during November 2015.

The 14th Federation of Asian and Oceania Biochemists and Molecular Biologists (FAOBMB) Congress and 84th Annual Meeting of the Society for Biological Chemistry, India (SBC-I) International (27–30 November 2015) was organized by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, India. CCMB undertakes research activities in Biomedicine and Biotechnology with a particular emphasis on providing centralised national facilities for new techniques in interdisciplinary research. The meeting was held at the Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS Pilani, Hyderabad) on the outskirts of Hyderabad. The meeting theme was: ‘Current Excitements in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology for Agriculture and Medicine’. Scientific sessions focused on basic scientific discoveries, emerging research areas, and new synergies in translational sciences.

The Organizing Committee, chaired by Dr Ch. Mohan Rao, Director of CCMB, and involving co-Chair, CCMB group leader Dr K. Thangaraj, an international advisory committee and a number of enthusiastic volunteer helpers, delivered a highly successful and enjoyable meeting, both scientifically and socially. The food was particularly memorable. There were about 500 participants, including 40 international speakers.

The meeting commenced with the announcement of President-Elect for the International Union of Biochemists and Molecular Biologists (IUBMB), Professor Andrew Wang, a Distinguished Research Fellow in the Institute of Biological Chemistry at Academia Sinica, Taiwan, a well-known structural biologist, and Past-President of FAOBMB.

Highlights of the scientific program included the twelve Plenary or Award talks, including the Kunio Yagi Lecture from Professor Shubha Tole, India, describing a single master transcription factor that controls the formation of the cerebral cortex, providing a blueprint for building the brain. The FEBS Keynote was presented by Giulio Superti-Furga, Director of CeMM, the Research Center for Molecular Medicine, Vienna, and described work on the molecular and systems biology of drug action, including chemical proteomics approaches to determine drug targets and ‘off-targets’. Other highlight talks included the IUBMB Plenary Lecture by Ulrich Hartl, Germany, describing the role of the nuclear compartment as a ‘safe-place’ for protein aggregates as part of the homeostasis mechanisms; and the Plenary from Kanurty Rao (International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Delhi; ICGEB) who described the ways in which Mycobacterium tuberculosis manipulates the central carbon metabolism of its host cell, inducing an accumulation of neutral lipids, to counteract bactericidal pathways such as autophagy. Dr Manajit Hayer-Hartl, Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry, described the complex chaperone machinery required for assembly of RuBisCO, the major protein in plants responsible for fixation of CO₂.

The winner of the 2015 FAOBMB Award for Research Excellence was David Craik, University of Queensland. David’s memorable talk on the discovery and applications of cyclic peptides in biomedicine described the journey from basic biology to translation. His talk was enlivened by images of his heroic efforts to collect cyclic peptides in different parts of the world, as well as by some electrical failure issues.

Dr Martin Stone (Monash University, Australia) was a key speaker in the IUBMB-supported Education Symposium and talked about his efforts to prepare PhD students for careers beyond the standard research career path.

The meeting was preceded by a Young Scientist Program (YSP) (24–26 November 2015), with 27 participants. These included six Australians: two ASBMB fellowship recipients, Ash Hoque (University of Melbourne) and Professor David Craik, recipient of the 2015 FAOBMB Award for Research Excellence. Australian winners of the FAOBMB Young Scientist Awards, Dr Urmi Dhagat and Dr Victor Anggono (second and third from left, respectively), with Professor Kiyoshi Fukui (President) and Professor Sheila Nathan (Acting Secretary-General).
Yogesh Khandokar (Charles Sturt University), two FAOBMB fellowship recipients, Justin Wong (Centenary Institute, University of Sydney) and Rajesh Ghai (Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute), and two FAOBMB Young Scientist Awards, Urmi Dhagat (St Vincent’s Medical Research Institute, Melbourne) and Victor Anggono (Queensland Brain Institute), all of whom spoke at the YSP Program. Urmi and Victor also gave excellent talks as part of the main program, describing their work on interleukin-3 receptor signalling and glutamate receptor trafficking, respectively.

The FAOBMB Council Meeting preceded the official Congress program (Thursday 26 November), with Leann Tilley as the Australian delegate (ASBMB representative). The meeting was attended by delegates from 14 of the 21 constituent member countries and was chaired by the FAOBMB President, Professor Kiyoshi Fukui (Japan), and Acting Secretary-General Sheila Nathan (Malaysia – in place of Phillip Nagley who was on temporary leave of absence as Secretary General for medical reasons). Kiyoshi Fukui announced Professor Zengyi Chang as President Elect for FAOBMB, commencing in January 2016. The President promoted the Exchange Fellowships, Visiting Lectureships and Travel Lectureship as a great way for students/ postdocs and more senior scientists to interact with colleagues in another FAOBMB country.

Inspired by initiatives developed by the ASBMB, the Council had previously established a Working Group, chaired by Leann Tilley, to develop a gender equality policy. The policy indicates that membership of FAOBMB-sponsored conference/ workshop organising committees, of conference theme coordinators and symposium chairs and invited plenary speakers, should be at least 40% female and at least 40% male. In addition, opportunities should be provided for early-/mid-career researchers to be symposium chairs. Kiyoshi Fukui and IUBMB President-elect, Andy Wang, were very supportive and the Council approved the proposed FAOBMB Gender Equality Policy.

The 25th FAOBMB Conference will be held in Manila, Philippines, in December, 2016. In the year following the 26th FAOBMB Conference in Japan in 2017, the next triennial IUBMB Congress will be held as a joint meeting with the FAOBMB Congress in Seoul, Korea, 4–9 June 2018. This report, written by Leann Tilley, was published in the April 2016 issue of the Australian Biochemist and is reproduced with her permission.