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## 19TH ANNUAL MEETING - WE MADE IT!!

Third time really was the charm!

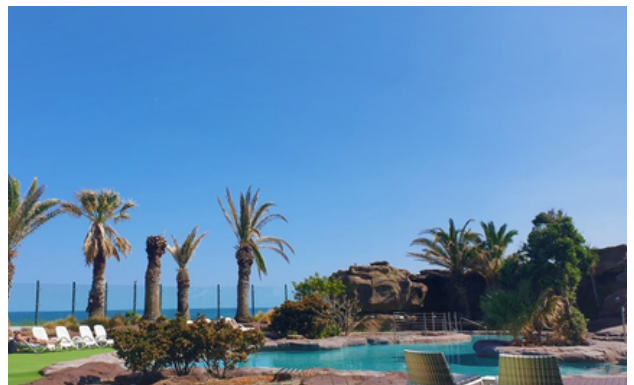
After two false starts I think we were all incredibly excited to finally be on our way to stunning Perth and when ABNA promised Blue Sky Horizons - Perth was more than ready to deliver!

For anyone who has been involved in the planning and delivery of an annual conference, you know that it takes an army. ABNA is extremely fortunate to have several committees of dedicated and driven individuals who demonstrated extreme resilience in been planning and developing this meeting since 2019. I honestly can't thank them enough for their continued enthusiasm, innovation, and sheer hard work during incredibly challenging times. The fruits of these efforts spoke from themselves.

I'd also like to say a huge thank you to our sponsors and exhibitors who provided unwavering support to the ABNA community. Many of you have been with us for a number of years and it was absolutely wonderful to reconnect with you in person. We feel extremely fortunate to continue our partnership as, without you, these events would simply not be possible. Thank you!

ABNA's 19th Annual Meeting 'Biobanking: Blue Sky Horizons!' saw a year of firsts, with the inclusion of debates, elevator pitch competitions and a broad program scope. As we recognised last year, the pandemic and rapid transition to online and hybrid models of working resulted in a change to the way we network and develop relationships. It also gave us time to reflect on our daily operations, strategic models and what it means to be biobankers and biospecimen scientists. These reflections were at the heart of this meeting.

This meeting was a pivotal milestone in the unique opportunity we've been presented; a blue sky from which to explore the role that our profession will play in an ever-expanding research ecosystem. It's an exciting time where we can plan for new pathways and for new horizons in biospecimen science and support infrastructure. As we reconnected in person or finally met face-to-face with new members of our community, we were reminded of the diversity and heterogeneity within the ABNA member base. Thank you to every single person; speaker, delegate, sponsor, committee member (and anyone i've forgotten) who contributed to this!



*Perth welcoming us with its best blue sky on the opening day of the conference.*

The value of collaboration was particularly resonant for me personally during a visit to the Kings Park Biobank. Having not experienced much in the way of botanical or seed banking, seeing such synergy in technique, challenges and opportunities was incredibly exciting and I'd like to extend my thanks for their kind invitation. Diversity is an inherent strength of our community and as research moves towards collaborative and multi-disciplinary models of working, I'm sure I speak for all of us when I say this multi-disciplinary meeting was an invaluable opportunity for us to lead by collaborative example and to learn from each other.

Be it cancer or coral, whales or wheat, forensic samples or biological data registries, the core principles of biospecimen science and biobanking remain consistent. As we move into a post-pandemic world, we're reminded of the importance of integrated working and as a fundamental stakeholder in the research sector, it's imperative that we form partnerships and deconstruct historic silos. I'm incredibly excited that this meeting affords us the space to continue to do that as a community.

A celebration of diversity and focus on collaborative optimism is what we hope you experienced at Biobanking: Blue Sky Horizons. From a personal standpoint, ABNA has provided this relatively new biobanker (new when compared with some of the stalwarts of our community) with an opportunity to learn, network and expand my appreciation for collaborative opportunities. I'm incredibly excited that at our 19th Annual Meeting, among colleagues and friends, we were able to continue providing these opportunities to the biobanking and biospecimen scientist community.

We trust you enjoyed the event days and look forward to continuing to build and advance the ABNA with you. We'd love to hear your [feedback](#) ahead of our 20th Annual Meeting 'Biobanking on Record' which will be held October 2023 at Sea World on the Gold Coast!

Yours in biobanking,



*Cassandra Griffin*

ABNA President

(Networking with the locals!)



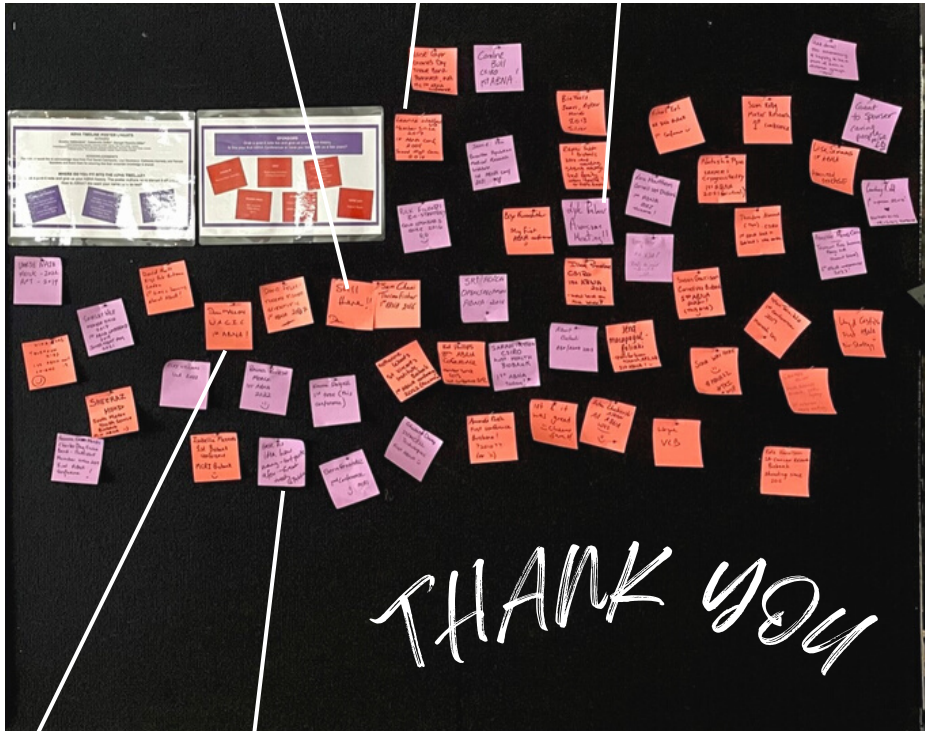
Thank you to all the delegates and sponsors who added their own dates to the ABNA timeline board. Zoom in to read them all, click on the poster for more information about ABNAs Achievement in Australasian Biobanking award, coming in 2023.

### ABNA Achievement in Australasian Biobanking Award

To mark ABNA's 20th Annual Conference, ABNA will be introducing the Achievement in Australasian Biobanking Award in 2023. This award is designed for current ABNA members to recognize another member, past or present, who has contributed and/or continues to contribute to the Australasian biobanking community. The Achievement in Australasian Biobanking award will be open for nomination and awarded every two years, with the inaugural announcement at ABNA's Annual Conference. Nominees can include biobankers, clinicians, pathologists, pediatricians, hereditary managers and/or researchers who demonstrate ABNA's core aims and mission. For more information on nominations and the selection process please visit [abna.org.au](http://abna.org.au)

#### ABNA's Timeline

- 2023 • 20th Annual Conference
- 2022 • Biobanking - Blue Sky Horizons, Perth, Western Australia - 19th Annual Conference
- ABNA Sentinel Series Launched and Biopreserver Research Network Established
- 2021 • Together Again: Bridging the Network Virtual Event with SA, WA & Qld State Hubs - 18th Annual Conference
- Mitable insights - Phase 3 launch
- Expansion of Institute membership allowances
- Tissue Specimen Donor Informed Consent, Informed Specimen Donor
- 2020 • The ABC of Biobanking: Future-proofing Network Quality, Cairns, Queensland - 17th Annual Conference
- ABNA representative at National Biobanking Summit, Sydney
- 2019 • The Art of Biobanking, Melbourne, Victoria - 16th Annual Conference
- 2018 • Bridging the Gap - From the Clinic To The Biobank, Brisbane, Queensland - 15th Annual Conference
- First edition of ABNA newsletter Bio-Babble circulated
- Standard Australia invitation to be a Networking Organisation on HE-032 committee
- 2017 • Biobanking: Blood, Tissue and Beyond, Adelaide, South Australia - 14th Annual Conference
- Merger of ABNA Oncology and ABNA webinars commence
- 2016 • Sustainable biobanking in the face of change, Sydney, New South Wales - 13th Annual Conference
- 2015 • Australian Harmonisation of Kiwi & Kiwi: Embracing Commonalities, Christchurch, New Zealand - 12th Annual Conference
- OHSK Affiliation Organisation agreement signed
- 2014 • The New Era in Biobanking, Melbourne, Victoria - 11th Annual Conference
- 2013 • The Person at the Centre of Biobanking, Hobart, Tasmania - 10th Annual Conference
- 2012 • Diagnostics, Research and Biobanks - Integration for Improved Health Outcomes, Perth, Western Australia - 9th Annual Conference
- 2011 • Biobanking: The convergence and future of translational research, Brisbane, Queensland - 8th Annual Conference
- Aus Biobank Leading Grant awarded (2010 - 2013)
- 2010 • Biobanking: Past, Present and Future, Melbourne, Victoria - 7th Annual Conference
- ABNA incorporated as an association (Victoria). Rules of the Association adopted & first election held
- 2009 • Enabling medical research: Opportunities and challenges for tissue banks within health, Sydney, New South Wales - 6th Annual Conference
- 2008 • ABNA Conference, Melbourne, Victoria - 5th Annual Conference
- ABNA Biopreserver Protocols released - best practice principles in tissue banking for new biopreservers
- 2007 • Tissue Banking: Donor Perspectives, Melbourne, Victoria - 4th Annual Conference
- Tissue Specimen Donor gene law
- 2006 • Ethical issues in biobanking, Brisbane, Queensland - 3rd Annual Conference
- 2005 • 2nd Annual Meeting as a participating society at the Australian Health & Medical Research Congress
- Aus NIMMTC Enabling Grant awarded (2004 - 2009) & ABNA Oncology project commences
- 2004 • First formal ABNA Meeting/Conference - Monash University, Melbourne
- 2003 • Australasian Biopreserver Network (ABN) established
- ABNA Oncology subgroup created
- 2002 • Initial meeting of Australian scientists involved in biobanking, Cancer Institute Conference on Molecular & Cellular Biology, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Melbourne
- 2001



Still Here!!  
Dan

Leanne Wallace UQ  
Member since 2017  
1st ABNA conf 2005  
Joined Mgt Com 2018

Lyle Palmer  
Awesome Meeting!!

Dom Mallon W.A.C.I.C  
1st ABNA!

Have no idea how many - but quite a few - great meeting Catherine





## 5 MIN WITH A BIOBANKER

We approach a different professional in the biobanking arena with the same five questions each month.



Debra Leiolani Garcia currently works as an independent consultant. She has been an active member of ISBER, serving on numerous committees and was elected as President in 2020-2021.

### THE QUICK QUESTIONS

**Tea or Coffee?** Tea

**Cats or Dogs?** Dogs

**Coriander?** No, no, no!

**Star Trek or Star Wars?** Star Wars

#### 1. How long have you been working in biobanking?

20 years with the AIDS and Cancer Specimen Resource, 2 years as an independent consultant

#### 2. What has been the biggest biobanking challenge you have faced in your career so far?

Working with an international group of biobankers mostly for South East Asia has been a challenge due to differing regulatory and ethical issues. We have to be open and understanding of varying opinions so we can work towards the goal of standardization of protocols that is acceptable to their country's procedures.

#### 3. What are you excited about that is happening in your biobank/what is your biobank doing that is new and innovative?

I am currently working on a project with biobankers from various South East Asia nations to develop a feasibility study to determine the need to create a central regional infectious disease biobank. The central biobank will enable the sharing of specimens and associated data for researchers throughout the region giving them the best materials for their research projects.

#### 4. What is your one wish as a biobanker?

My one wish is a two-parter: That there is better understanding of what is the purpose of biobanks and how they contribute to the on-going research to provide a better understanding of disease process.

#### 5. Three words that best describe your biobanking career:

Growth, open-mind, diversity

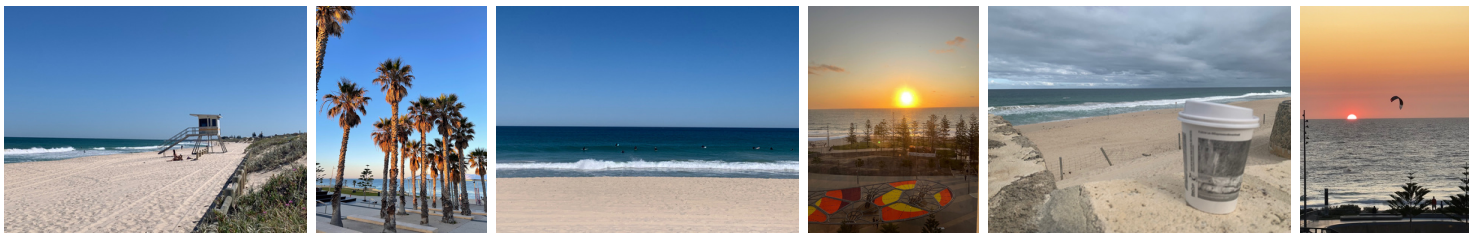


# MY FIRST IN-PERSON ABNA CONFERENCE

By Carmel Quinn

This year the ABNA meeting was held at the spectacular location of Scarborough in WA and I was fortunate enough to attend. Despite having worked in biobanking for several years at UNSW Sydney, this was my first opportunity to attend an 'in person' ABNA conference; and it was made all the more memorable because like so many other circumstances in recent months, it was the first time the ABNA community had the opportunity to meet face-to-face since the COVID pandemic began.

The journey from Sydney was long, but it was the 3-hour time difference which was a 'shock to the system', certainly enough of a time difference to make me feel a little discombobulated. However, the sunny skies and sparkling blue ocean were a very welcome sight after leaving a soggy Sydney behind.



After a truly memorable Welcome to Country by Mr Olman Walley, Day 1 of the ABNA conference began with a Keynote Address by Prof Dominic Mallon from the Fiona Stanley Hospital in Perth. Prof Mallon reflected on the utility of biobanking in building valuable cohorts at different times during his career, including early on in HIV research, and more recently in the WA COVID-19 pandemic. Prof Mallon has been instrumental in establishing the WA COVID-19 Immunity Collective (WACIC) Biobank, for prospective immune monitoring of the WA population; this has allowed 'early warning' for immunocompromised patients as COVID variants have spread into WA and is a valuable biospecimen and data resource that will be made available to others.

Day 1 of the conference saw the first of two 'debates' scheduled during the meeting, a novel format for presentation and discussion. Debate #1 involved 2 online contributors, Jugnu Jain (Sapiens Bioscience, Hyderabad, India) and Georgina Hold (UNSW Sydney), presenting the case 'for' (Dr Jain) and 'against' (Prof Hold) commercial biobanks, "Industry collaborators: Friend or Foe?". Both speakers eloquently argued their case, and in fact held a lot of common ground.

Day 1 also saw the 4th and final installment in the Biobank Accreditation seminar series delivered by Samantha Higgins (Victorian Cancer Bank) and Helen Tsimiklis (Biobanking Victoria), followed by some fascinating presentations about Aquatic Biobanking. Particularly memorable was the description of how to make an Adelie Penguin vomit - a prerequisite for monitoring their diet and by extension for gaining valuable information concerning the food chain (Simon Jarman, University of WA, Perth, WA; to be fair - he did assure us that they no longer use this method). Prof Jarman also discussed the importance of banking aquatic animal specimens as reference samples, used when gauging animal age by measuring DNA methylation; this is vital for the management of aquatic animal populations.



*Mr Olman Walley during his Welcome to Country, ABNA President Cassandra Griffin opens the conference and plenary speaker Prof Dominic Mallon.*

Day 2 of the meeting began with 2 concurrent workshops - I chose to attend the "Dress your Biobank for Success" option, run by Susan Garrison (Cornell Veterinary Bank, NY, USA). This engaging session covered many aspects of communication and marketing, all vital for the sustainability of biobanking but possibly not areas in which many biobanks excel. This was followed by 2 presentations which shared the theme of 'Donors and Beneficiaries': first a fascinating presentation by Prof Lyn Griffiths (Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Qld) about how genomics was being employed along with genealogy to identify some of the 30,000 ADF members unaccounted for from conflicts going back to WWI. Secondly, Raelene Endersby and Jessica Buck (Telethon Kids Biobank, Perth, WA) spoke about community engagement in paediatric brain cancer banking, as well as looking at this from an Indigenous perspective.

The second, lively debate was also held on day 2 with Craig Willers (Department of Health, WA) arguing 'for' and Amanda Rush (University of Sydney, NSW) arguing 'against' the proposal that one model of participant consent is suitable for all. This was followed by a revealing talk by vet Clare Madden (Sea World, Gold Coast, Qld) where we learnt about biospecimen collection for autopsy of marine mammals, including the importance of engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders involved when a stranding event occurs. The subsequent presentation by Gail Alvares (Telethon Kids Institute, Perth, WA) about the Australian Autism Biobank also highlighted the importance of careful stakeholder engagement.

Other notable presentations that afternoon included a description of the impressive Leipzig Medical Biobank (Leipzig, Germany) by their director, Ronny Baber, and a compelling story from Julie Hibbert (Telethon Kids Institute & Murdoch University, WA) about collecting biospecimen samples from tiny, very premature babies and the development of a method for the early diagnosis of sepsis in these infants.

Day 2 was wrapped up by a delicious Conference Dinner where the wine flowed and which was very well attended, and seemingly enjoyed by all - certainly by myself (we won't mention that the rain had arrived in Perth by this point).



*Prof Lyn Griffiths presents before joining the panel discussion with (from L-R) Margaret Wood, Dr Jessica Buck & Dr Raelene Endersby, starters at the conference dinner, La Capannina.*

The third and final day of the meeting saw the return of the sunshine and began with presentations about zoological biobanking. In particular, the presentation by Lachlan Howell (Deakin University, Melbourne, Vic) made a strong case for the need to establish a fertility biobank for koalas; these iconic animals are under increasing pressure through destruction of habitat and natural disasters, and while it was acknowledged that many other species share these pressures, the need to maintain the koala gene pool may be easier to communicate to the broader community. Despite the gravity of the koalas' plight, there was some light relief when we were informed that frozen koala sperm explodes when thawed...

The zoological talks were followed by presentations from the Agricultural and Biodiversity sector, including seed banking of wild species from WA (David Merritt, WA Department of Biodiversity & Conservation) and agricultural species (Alan Humphries, Australian Pastures Genebank, Adelaide, SA). We learnt about the difficulties in monitoring seed quality for the enormous number of plant species (with the limited resources available), methods for assessing seed viability, and the enormous variation in how seeds from different climates tolerate current preservation techniques. Following these was an online presentation by Jonathan Daly (Taronga Conservation Society, NSW) about the cryopreservation of coral which is so vital in attempts to protect and regenerate reefs around the world including Australia's own Great Barrier Reef.



The final afternoon of the meeting saw presentations focused around data. Prof Lyle Palmer (University of Adelaide, SA) spoke about the ambitious and impressive Biospecimen and Data Linkage Resource (BIOLINKer), a new data infrastructure platform which SA appears uniquely positioned to develop due to an existing fortuitous combination of state-level health datasets. This was followed by a presentation by Paul Kennedy (University of Technology, Sydney, NSW) that eloquently explained how AI is being used in a cross-disciplinary approach to analyse paediatric tumours.



*Prof Lyle Palmer presenting, Dr Lara Mouttham presents on Cornell University's Dog Aging Project, ABNA President and Vice-President Cassandra Griffin and Dr Georget Reaiche-Miller, announcing the location for ABNA's 20th Annual Conference.*

It is impossible to do justice to the number and high quality of the presentations throughout the meeting, including the several 'rapid fire' presentations and the range of posters on display. However, from my point of view, a few overarching themes were clear:

- It was common for studies to experience lengthy and complex ethics and governance processes before being able to proceed; this was mainly in regard to human biospecimens/data but was common across different jurisdictions. Also of interest was that even regarding biodiversity/seed banking, ethical considerations were also raised around removal of native specimens from traditional homelands of Indigenous Australians.
- Perhaps an extension of this is the perennial topic of ethics around informed consent; a variety of opinions about this subject were shared, particularly in conjunction with the two debates that were held during the meeting. This is not an issue that will be resolved quickly and easily.
- Finally, the breadth and depth of information presented at this ABNA meeting was truly impressive and makes ABNA possibly unique in uniting people across such different disciplines (biomedical, veterinary, zoological, plant biodiversity and more) in one space, discovering that we do have issues in common and can all learn from each other (apologies if that last line is a little 'cheesy' - but it's true!)

In conclusion, I thoroughly enjoyed my first ABNA meeting (and I haven't even spoken about the great food and daily walks along the beach!). Congratulations to the organising committee who did such a fantastic job. At the end of the meeting, ABNA President Cass Griffin made the exciting announcement that next year's meeting will be held at Sea World on the Gold Coast! I am sure that attendance will be high - personally I need to start thinking of abstract topics asap as I do not want to miss out!

Dr Carmel Quinn (DPhil; MPH) is a Senior Project Officer for the Health Precincts Biobank (formerly the Health Science Alliance, HSA, Biobank), within Biospecimen Services at UNSW, Sydney.

She was, at this year's conference, elected to the ABNA Management Committee.

Photo credits: Dr Carmel Quinn, Dr Jennie Hui, Dr Anusha Hettiaratchi

If you have any suggestions for a short article for Bio-Babble, please contact: [abna.biobabble@gmail.com](mailto:abna.biobabble@gmail.com)

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