

ESA-SCBO 2022

28 November – 2 December 2022 | Wollongong NSW



ESA



SCB Oceania

JOINT CONFERENCE

Ecological Society of Australia and
Society for Conservation Biology Oceania

Joint Conference 2022

26 November – 2 December

Wollongong, NSW, Australia

RECONNECTING

Reconnecting with Nature;

Reconnecting with Each Other

Society for Conservation Biology Oceania

Final Report

1 July, 2023



Society for Conservation Biology
Oceania



Event Summary

The Ecological Society of Australia and the Society for Conservation Biology Oceania Inc. (SCBO) co-hosted the ESA-SCBO Conference from November 28th to December 2nd on Dharawal country in Wollongong, NSW, Australia at the Novotel North Wollongong Hotel (<https://www.esascbo2022.org.au/>).

The meeting brought together the Australian and broader Oceania community of conservation professionals and ecologists to present new findings, initiatives, methods, tools and opportunities in ecology and conservation science and practice. Scientists, Traditional Knowledge holders, students, managers, practitioners and other conservation professionals participated. In addition to a full and world-class scientific program of talks, we also offered a range of social events, workshops and field trips. There was also a weekend dedicated to postgraduate student experiences and skill-building on November 26th and November 27th which was held at the University of Wollongong.

Local Organising Committee

Dieter Hochuli (Co-Chair)
Micha Jackson (Co-Chair)*
Aaron Greenville
Don Driscoll
Gail Spina
Julia Rayment
Mark Ooi
Nicola Nelson*
Stephanie Courtney-Jones
Tim Doherty*

*indicates SCBO representation

Professional support for the conference was provided by Kaigi Conferencing and Events.

We thank the Local Organizing Committee for their tireless voluntary efforts without which the conference could not have been a success.

Scientific Program and Event Format

Summary

The conference was primarily an in-person event, but plenaries and one concurrent session on each conference day were live-streamed and could be accessed via the virtual registration option. Virtual presentation was only available to those living outside Australia who could not travel to Australia for the conference.

The main conference program was delivered over four days from 28 November to 1 December. The conference commenced with a Welcome to Country from Joyce Donovan and an Opening Message from the Honourable James Henry Griffin MP, NSW Minister for Environment & Heritage.

Plenary sessions featured 12 keynote speakers, including one 2022 SCB Regional Distinguished Service Award winner and one 2021 SCB Distinguished Service Award Winner (see details below).

There was an additional plenary comprised of seven talks from ESA award winners. The core program comprised 15 symposia and 34 open forums held concurrently over the four days.

In addition, the Barbara Rice Memorial Poster Session was held on 28 November, with 124 posters accepted for the event.

A student weekend was held on 26 and 27 November prior to the conference, which included an SCBO Icebreaker Lunch, a Student Conference Talks Skills Workshop (84 registrants) and a Post-Graduate Day (109 registrants).

A variety of social events were held throughout the conference week and are detailed below. A number of field trip opportunities were also offered, including short trips during the mornings and evenings of conference days and longer outings during the Workshop and Field Day on 2 December, which also included 13 workshop offerings.

Keynote Speakers

- Ian Cresswell, co-chair State of the Environment 2021: “Responding to the 2021 State of the Environment Report”
- Ran Nathan, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel: “The high-throughput revolution in movement ecology”
- Esau Kekeubata and Dorothy Esau, Baru Conservation Alliance, Solomon Islands: “Conservation Kwaio Style: Caring for people, culture and the environment in Solomon Islands”
- Oliver Costello, Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation: “Learning from Country”
- Sarah Legge, University of Queensland and Australian National University: “Connecting the dots across Australia’s deserts: the Arid Zone Monitoring Project” SCB DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD WINNER 2021
- Moses Kerry, Mauberema Ecotourism and Nature Conservation Education Research and Training Center, Papua New Guinea: “Creating a Sustainable Conservation Approach in Papua New Guinea: A key tool for Biodiversity Conservation Management, Climate Change Mitigation and Socioeconomic Development for Forest Developing Countries” SCB REGIONAL DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD 2022
- John Morgan, La Trobe University: “How does your native grassland grow?” ESA AUSTRALIAN ECOLOGY RESEARCH AWARD
- Adrienne Nicotra, Australian National University: “What is (plant) thermal tolerance? And does it matter in a warming world?”
- Holly Bradley, Curtin University: “Conserving an endangered species and a critically endangered language” 2022 ESA NEXT GENERATION AWARD
- Richard Kingsford, University of New South Wales: “Ecology in the Anthropocene - lessons learnt” ESA 2021 GOLD MDEAL
- Kris French, University of Wollongong: “Gardening Australia” ESA 2021 GOLD MDEAL
- Tatsuya Amano, University of Queensland: “Transcending language barriers, reconnecting evidence and people for conservation”



Symposia

- State of the Environment Report 2021
- From disconnect to reconnect: integrating soil microbial communities into fundamental ecology, conservation, and restoration
- In the canopy after the fires: Reconnecting to build a new understanding of Australian gliders and possums
- How much is enough? Setting meaningful targets for biodiversity conservation
- Is connecting with nature enough to support conservation action? Key challenges we need to tackle to move the field forward
- Indigenous ecological knowledge
- Maximising outcomes for biodiversity and society through innovative approaches to private land conservation
- Nothing to see here: Natural history notes and null results
- Collaborative approaches to monitoring significant species and habitats using Indigenous knowledge, technical assessments and citizen science
- Empowering researchers and decision-makers to solve environmental problems through Virtual Laboratories
- Australian 2019/20 Bushfires. National synthesis of biodiversity responses
- A new vision and pathway for conservation
- Australian ecosystems at +3°C and beyond
- Emotions in Ecology
- Ecological connections: Informing Recovery from Natural Disasters

Field Trips

To give participants some nature immersion amongst the conference sessions, morning birdwatching was offered several times at Puckeys Estate Nature Reserve, an annex of Wollongong Botanic Garden that includes rare coastal habitats including includes rainforest, dunes and marshland. Greater Glider & Nocturnal Mammals night tours were also offered.

The two field trips offered during the field day were: “Behind the Scenes at Sydney Olympic Park”, an exploration of 25 years into a 100+ year ecological restoration project, and “Fires and Fires”, a visit to cultural burn and high severity bushfire sites with cultural land managers and fire scientists.

Social Events

Social events were a key programmatic aspect that supported the conference theme of reconnecting. In addition to fieldtrips and extensive networking opportunities provided through program components such as the poster session and student weekend, the following were the key additional social events organised by the conference:

SCBO Ice-Breaker Lunch - held at the commencement of the student weekend to allow board members and local organising committee members from SCBO and ESA and post-graduate students attending pre-conference events to meet and socialise informally.

Registration and Welcome Drinks – held on the evening of Sunday 27 November for delegates to collect their conference name badge and network with fellow attendees.

Queer Mixer – a chance for LGBTQIA+ ecologists and allies to get together for an informal networking event. This event aimed to support people to reconnect, make new friends and feel welcome as part of the ESA and SCBO communities.

EcoCommons Launch Event – an event to celebrate the launch of EcoCommons, a platform for Australian practitioners and researchers access to trusted, world-leading ecological and environmental modelling tools to help protect and restore the planet.

SCB Social Science Working Group (SSWG) Speed Networking – an opportunity for all graduate and undergraduate students to network with social science professionals.

SCBO and SCB SSWG Mixer – an opportunity for all delegates to connect with representatives from SCBO and the SCB SSWG.

Science Slam – presented by The Science Communication Research Chapter of the ESA, a fun and fabulous night of performative science communication.

ESA-SCBO 2022 Conference Dinner – a relaxed opportunity for networking over a meal and drinks.

ESA-SCBO Trivia – a chance to have to fun and wind down following the close of the main conference program. Supported by The University of Queensland's Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science.

Workshops

1. *Intro to Acoustic Monitoring – from Deployment to Analysis*. Facilitators: Fran Tattersall, Harry Rust and Nancy Liu
2. *A Beginner's Guide to Data Analysis and Visualisation in R for Ecologists & Conservation Scientists using EcoCommons' Coding Cloud*. Facilitators: Emilia Decker, Jessica Fenker, Abhimanyu Raj Singh, Elisa Bayraktarov
3. *Using the R Package 'galah' to Investigate the Atlas of Living Australia*. Facilitators: Jenna Wraith
4. *How to develop inclusive conservation and environmental policies*. Facilitators: Katie Moon and Katharina Victoria Perez-Hammerle
5. *Getting started with R: an introduction for Conservation Social Scientists*. Facilitators: Matthew Selinske and Holly Kirk
6. *Smooth sailing ahead: navigating tricky conversations and interviews*. Facilitators: ESA Early Career Ecologists Working Group (Sarah Ryding, Caragh Threlfall, Steph Courtney Jones)
7. *Dynamic models in behavioural ecology*. Facilitated by: Cassie Speakman
8. *A Beginner's Guide to Data Analysis and Visualisation in Python for Ecologists & Conservation Scientists using EcoCommons' Coding Cloud*. Facilitators: Amanda Buyan, Rob Clemens, Emilia Decker, Jessica Fenker
9. *Writing for publication*. Facilitators: Nigel Andrew



10. *Using the EcoCommons' Point-and-click Dashboards to run Species Distribution Models, make Climate Projections and carry out Biosecurity Risk Mapping.* Facilitators: Rob Clemens, Emilia Decker, Jessica Fenker, Peter D. Wilson, Sean Haythorne
11. *Open Ecoacoustics: Tools, Training, and Data.* Facilitators: Kellie Vella and Paul Roe
12. *TERN infrastructure to enable submission and access to FAIR terrestrial ecosystem data.* Facilitators: Siddeswara Guru, Elisa Maria Girola and Lachlan Charles
13. *Running Species Distribution Models in the EcoCommons' R environment.* Facilitators: Rob Clemens, Abhimanyu Raj Singh, Jessica Fenker

Pre-conference Student Weekend

The pre-conference student weekend kicked off with the SCBO Ice-Breaker Lunch. This event was held to allow board members and local organising committee members from SCBO and ESA and post-graduate students attending pre-conference events to meet and socialise informally.

The Student Conference Talks Skills Workshop was held for post graduate students to improve their conference talk skills, and practice talks to be delivered at the ESA-SCBO 2022 conference in a safe and friendly environment amongst peers.

The Post-Graduate Day included students and inspiring mentors who discussed the latest emerging ideas and approaches arising within a variety of sub-disciplines in ecology and conservation biology and to ask the hard questions about building a career in science.

A number of leaders from SCBO and SCB Global participated in the Post-Graduate Day as mentors.

Student Travel Awards

With generous support from David Thomas, SCBO was able to provide travel support to help 21 students attend and participate in the conference including all student weekend activities prior to commencement of the conference.

Seven students (4 from USA, 2 from New Zealand and 1 from Australia) who have held leadership roles within SCBO received travel support in the form of flights to the conference; 9 students (3 from USA, 3 from New Zealand and 3 from Australia) were provided with accommodation during the week of the conference; 20 students (4 from USA, 3 from New Zealand and 13 from Australia) were supported by having their conference registration covered; and, one student from PNG who was unable to attend in person was supported to attend and present virtually.

This student cohort greatly enriched the conference, with all students giving either an oral or poster presentation and participating in the student weekend.

Two students who received this travel support were awarded two of the three prizes given by ESA for the best oral presentations by a student and one of the three prizes given by ESA for the best poster presentations by a student. These prizes were assessed by a volunteer panel of expert judges, and reflect the exceptional hard work put in by the students who received travel support to attend.

Conference Sponsorship

The conference leadership team worked with a variety of sponsors to develop packages appropriate to their needs. All major and conference sponsors received tables and exhibitor space at the

conference alongside an additional 9 exhibitors and tables for ESA and SCBO, creating an extensive exhibition hub for delegates situated immediately outside conference sessions.

MAJOR SPONSORS

- NSW Department of Planning and Environment
- TERN - National Ecosystem Monitoring
- Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC)

CONFERENCE SPONSORS

- Atlas of Living Australia
- EcoCommons
- The University of Queensland's Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science
- Wildlife Acoustics (Faunatech)

APP SPONSOR

The Rufford Foundation supported the conference app to improve the sustainability of the conference.

INDIGENOUS TRAVEL ASSISTANCE SPONSORSHIP

ESA managed Indigenous travel assistance, which was funded by the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program (NESP).

IN-KIND SUPPORT

University of Wollongong

FIELD TRIP SPONSOR

The Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC)

TRIVIA NIGHT SPONSOR

The University of Queensland's Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science

ADDITIONAL EXHIBITORS

- Advanced Telemetry Systems (ATS)
- Saving our Species program (Environment NSW)
- AusTraits
- CSIRO Publishing
- Science, Economics & Insights Division
- Great Eastern Ranges
- ArborCarbon
- The State of the Environment report
- Cumberland Plain Research.

PRINT ADVERTISEMENT

Writing Clear Science

SUPPORTERS

The Australian Flora Foundation and NRM Jobs provided support through a benefit swap arrangement.

Registration

Attendee numbers were high in comparison with previous ESA and SCBO conferences. We feel that this was result of: 1) an interesting and extensive program offering resulting from the joint conference format; 2) a fantastic line-up of diverse and experienced keynote speakers; 3) a significant number of sponsors and exhibitors; 4) the ability of SCBO and ESA to provide travel support; and, 5) a willingness and excitement for people to reconnect and share their work and experiences after the covid pandemic made in-person conferences impossible for several years.

Registration breakdown

TYPE	NUMBER
Non-Member Registrations	184
Member Registrations	544
Complimentary Registration - Invited Speaker, LOC, Media, Sponsor, Staff	86
Virtual Registration	32
Workshop or Field Trip Only	3
TOTAL	849

TYPE (DAY VS. FULL)	NUMBER
Day Registrations	120
Full Registrations	694
Virtual Registration	32
Workshop or Field Trip Only	3
TOTAL	849

TYPE (STANDARD VS. EARLY BIRD)	NUMBER
Standard Registration	348
Early bird Registration	380
Complimentary Registration - Invited Speaker, LOC, Media, Sponsor, Staff	86
Virtual Registration	32
Workshop or Field Trip Only	3
TOTAL	849

Registrant demographics

At least 86% of delegates were from Australia and around 4% were from overseas, while about 10% did not provide their location (Figure 1). International delegates were from Chile, China, Colombia, Germany, Guinea, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States.

Of Australian delegates attending in person, the majority were from NSW (40%), followed by VIC (19%) and QLD (17%) (Figure 2).

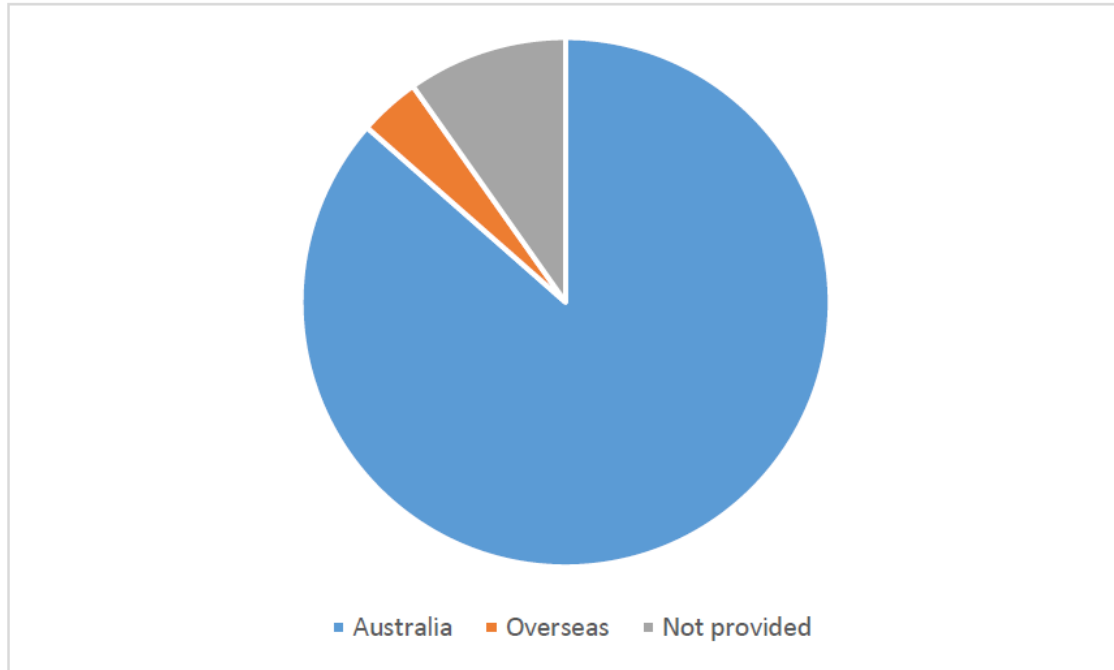


Figure 1: Delegate composition (global)

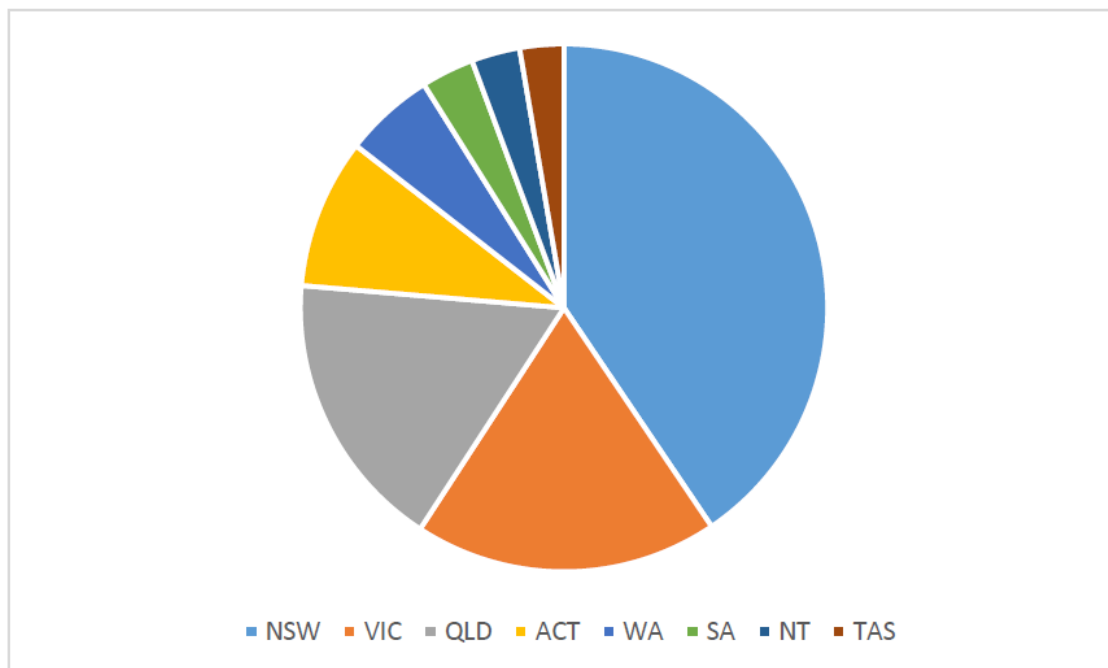


Figure 2: Delegate composition (within Australia)

Conference Policies

Conference attendees agreed in writing at the time of registration to adhere to the Ecological Society of Australia Code of Conduct and the [SCBO Anti-discrimination, bully and harassment policy and grievance resolution procedure](#). Both of these policies are aimed at providing a safe and welcoming environment at events and activities that is free from all forms of unacceptable behaviour, discrimination, bullying and harassment. Participants agreed to adhere to these policies

at the time of registration and had access to them through the conference website and conference app.

Highlights and challenges

Major highlights

The conference theme of reconnecting reverberated throughout the event and it was clear that people were very enthusiastic about meeting once again in person to network and share their research and experiences after the covid pandemic prevented in-person meetings for several years. Conference attendance was high and included almost 300 students. The poster session was particularly full, with over 120 posters accepted.

Social events and field trips were well attended and the abundant access to outdoors spaces at the conference venue (including an outdoor area for all meals and snacks) was well received. The dinner format of multiple themed buffets with casual non-assigned seating was also well received compared with previous conference standards of fixed meals and assigned seating, which people tend to feel limit interaction opportunities and can result in food wastage.

We are also very proud of the diverse and dynamic line-up of keynote speakers (see above) and the extensive Indigenous Ecological Knowledge symposium. Including Indigenous and regional Oceania perspectives is a key aim of all SCBO events and we were very honoured to host inspiring and insightful Indigenous leaders from in-country and abroad during the conference.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a key consideration for SCBO events including conferences. With financial assistance from long-term supporter the Rufford Foundation, the conference app was a cornerstone of sustainability efforts. In the pre-conference materials emailed to all conference attendees, delegates were notified that in the interest of sustainability there would be no printed version of the conference handbook, program or book of abstracts. Instead, all of these materials were made available through a conference app. Delegates received instructions on how to download the app on iOS and Android devices prior to the conference.

The conference app was the main port of call for all conference-related information, and 639 attendees logged in. Through the app, users could manage their profile (which could be seen by other attendees if desired), see the full conference agenda, create an agenda customised to the sessions they wanted to attend, view all abstracts and posters, see participant information and bios, and more.

In addition to the conference app other key sustainability initiatives included:

1. Lanyards. Name tags were printed on fully compostable cards containing native bottlebrush seeds that could be planted after the conference. No single use plastics were used. Lanyards were collected at the conference close.
2. Conference snacks and meals. Morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea were provided to delegates during the conference using durable crockery supplied by the conference venue. No disposable plates or crockery were provided during the conference.



3. Carbon Offset. During the registration process, delegates were offered the opportunity to make a \$30 contribution to offset the carbon emissions of their conference attendance. All delegate carbon offset contributions were used to support the Bidhudhu Budjan (Wattle Bird) Brown Family Clan Group for the Oallen Stewardship and Protection Project, an initiative local to the conference venue.

Ongoing impacts of Covid-19

Despite there being no formal covid regulations in NSW at the time of the conference, in the interests of covid safety, organisers requested that attendees consider wearing masks if they would like to do so, had masks available for delegates at the registration desk throughout the week, and asked attendees to refrain from attending if they did not feel well. We also provided information about covid safety on the conference website, conference app, and on printed materials at the conference, as well as an open outdoor space for all meals and snacks, including the conference dinner.

Unfortunately we understand anecdotally that many people contracted covid during the week of the conference. We thank delegates for their understanding and support of one another as covid continues to impact our community and all in-person events. We acknowledge that there was some discussion on social media following the conference that the organisers could have done more to prevent the spread of covid. Suggestions included mandating mask wearing, providing reminders about safe covid practices at the start of every session, and conducting a fully hybrid conference (we further note that the latter was not felt to be financially feasible by the organisers).

Covid impacted workshop attendance on the last day of the week, with a number of attendees cancelling their attendance and a number of workshop facilitators changing their workshops to online sessions accordingly. This had some financial impact on the conference as venue hire and catering still needed to be covered as originally scheduled.

Conference format

Related to the above, decisions around the appropriate mix of virtual and in-person conference offerings is a challenge for post-covid conference organisers. On the one hand, many people are keen to reconnect in person and fatigued by an excess of online time over the last few years. On the other hand, many people have become used to virtual participation and feel that these interactions are safer, more convenient, more equitable, and reduce carbon emissions.

In an attempt to respect and consider these various opinions, the conference leadership decided that the conference would be held primarily in person with equity addressed by aiming to provide as much support as possible for people including students and Indigenous practitioners who may not have otherwise been able to attend in person. People from outside Australia who were unable to travel to Australia in person were able to send pre-recorded virtual presentations. Low-cost virtual registrations were available to anyone, but presenters residing in Australia could not send pre-recorded virtual presentations.

The conference format was also partially constrained by the pre-existing choice of the Novotel North Wollongong Hotel as the venue. The ESA conference was originally planned to be held in Wollongong in 2020, but this was postponed due to covid. A deposit had been paid to secure the venue, which meant that holding a fully hybrid conference would likely have made the conference

financially unviable. In particular, a high number of online only registrations would have reduced conference revenue, making it harder to offset venue costs.

We feel that the low number of virtual registrants and the high number of in-person delegates reflected minimal appetite for passive online engagement in the conference, giving us confidence that the conference format was in line with expectations in 2022. As a society however, SCBO will continue to reach out to members and seek their feedback in an attempt to run events that are equitable and consider the various needs of our members. We are all learning together in the post-covid environment and the SCBO board invites feedback from members at any time.

International attendance

Unfortunately we were unable to attract significant attendance from the Oceania region (outside of Australia) to the conference. We feel that there are several reasons for this less than optimal outcome. First, at the time of the conference abstract deadline, individuals and institutions were generally still conservative about travelling to overseas destinations. Second, many universities had reduced capacity to fund travel (especially overseas travel) because of the financial impacts of covid. Third, international airfares to Australia have remained persistently high following the covid pandemic, reducing its attractiveness as a conference destination for overseas delegates. Fourth, the conference had an unfortunate date clash with the New Zealand Ecological Society 2022 Conference which undoubtedly reduced the participation of New Zealand delegates. This was largely the result of booking the conference venue a long time in advance because the ESA Wollongong conference was originally scheduled for 2020 and Australian venue bookings are exceedingly restricted following the backlog of events that were postponed as a result of the covid pandemic. Finally, we acknowledge the long-term wealth inequity in the region which often excludes the participation of practitioners from the Pacific Islands.

SCBO will make a concerted attempt to support events in the Oceania region outside of Australia over the next 1-2 years and beyond. We will also continue to pursue funding so that we can offer meaningful travel support to regional overseas participants to all SCBO conferences, including those held in Australia.

Finances

Conference finances were managed by ESA and Kaigi Conferencing and Events. As per the MOU between ESA and SCBO, 25% of the conference profits were distributed to SCBO following the conference, which totalled \$13,200 (excluding GST).