

Professor Joe Baker AO, OBE, FTSE, FRACI, C.Chem. AMSA Patron

Written by Dr Gina Newton, AMSA Past President (2004-2006)

At the 2007 annual conference in Melbourne, AMSA acknowledged Professor Joe Baker for his distinguished career and contribution to marine science by awarding him the prestigious honour of being the Australian Marine Sciences Association's inaugural Patron. During his 40+ years in science, Prof. Baker has been an inspirational leader of the Australian marine science community, mentored many key figures in Australian science, and increased knowledge about the plants and animals living in Australia's marine territory. Joe's achievements, roles, contributions and accolades are too numerous to cover in detail however a taster follows that will hopefully illustrate the importance and lasting value of Joe's work and influence.



After an academic career in chemistry at James Cook University, followed by leadership of the Roche Research Institute of Marine Pharmacology, Prof. Baker founded aquaculture and marine biodiscovery research at the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) in Townsville. As a direct result, AIMS has contributed significantly to the growth of the prawn aquaculture industry in Queensland and has discovered two chemical compounds in sponges that are currently in pre-clinical trials as potential anti-cancer drugs from the sea. Joe was also instrumental in generating awareness and progress in the issues surrounding the ethical utilisation of biodiversity in biotechnology research, within the Asian Pacific region. He helped underpin the landmark Manila Declaration in 1992, and the Malacca Accord in 1994, and also in 1994 co-authored the fundamental tome on the Australian regulatory situation. This work laid the foundation for Australian regulatory reform and for AIMS to later become a world leader in resolving access and benefit sharing policy issues regarding marine biotechnology research.

Prof. Baker was honoured earlier this year for his outstanding contribution to marine biotechnology by AIMS when they dedicated their new biotechnology wing in his name. As quoted by Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Jim Peacock, The Joe Baker Wing is a tribute both to Joe Baker's advancement of marine biotechnology at AIMS and to the subsequent achievements in understanding the molecular biodiversity of Australia's oceans.

Joe Baker has also been a tremendous environmental advocate for Australia and was instrumental in promoting acceptance of the concepts of sustainable resource use. He was one of the early scientific pioneers to value the sustainable management of tropical ecosystems and promote the use of entire resources of megabiodiverse systems. He brought together the scientific disciplines to study the interactions and interdependencies of different species and their habitats in order to really understand the application of sciences for conservation. He has been influential in Earthwatch, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Australian Heritage Committee, World Wildlife Fund Australia. A foundation member of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Joe had the honour of appearing before the World Heritage Committee to nominate the Great Barrier Reef Region for inscription on the World Heritage list. Joe has persistently championed a holistic approach to sustainable resource management, advocating systematic processes to acquire knowledge for social, cultural, economic and ecological

impacts of natural resource use. Joe is strongly dedicated to national and international cooperation.

Throughout his distinguished career Professor Joe Baker has received many honours, including the Order of the British Empire in 1982 for services to marine science, appointment as an officer in the Order of Australia in 2002 for his contribution to environmental studies and chemistry, and the Lifetime Clunies Ross award as a gifted contributor to his disciplines and a person of national and international repute. He has held many high level and prestigious positions, including being elected a Fellow of the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering in 1989, as well as a Fellow of the Royal Australian Chemical Institute. From 1993 to 2004 he was the Commissioner for the Environment of the Australian Capital Territory and pioneered state of the environment reporting for the region. In 1999 he became Chief Scientist of Queensland's Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries - a position he still holds today. Both roles involve the provision of advice to government on strategic policy issues related to public research and sustainable development. A great communicator and public speaker, Joe is on the editorial board of several international marine journals; he has authored and been editor of several books, and has authored or co-authored over 50 scientific papers. For the past 25 or so years, Joe has been an invited speaker at an average of eight scientific/natural resource related conferences a year.

A keen sportsman, Joe was a Queensland rugby League player and a rugby coach for many, many years. He is a foundation and continuing member of the board of the Queensland Academy of Sport and chairs many of their committees to this day. Joe is also a dedicated family man, and with his wife Val, has four children (now adults) and nine grandchildren.

But most of all, to those who know him personally, Joe is an absolute inspiration - his tireless and selfless determination to make a difference to marine science, the environment, and sustainable resource use have certainly paid off. Both the Australian and international communities owe a lot to Joe's initiative, drive and achievements, not to mention his keen ability for strategic advice. Joe is an Honorary Life Member of AMSA and his service as Past President, National Council member and ordinary member have also greatly enhanced the association. On behalf of all of AMSA's members, past and present, it is truly a delight and privilege to honour Joe Baker as the Australian Marine Sciences Association's inaugural Patron.