



## From the President

The two issues that the RACI has identified as the key to the future of chemistry in Australia are the communication of chemistry and the teaching of chemistry. If we can improve both of those aspects of the discipline then much benefit will flow to chemists and to Australian society.

The RACI has taken a leadership position for the chemical community in these areas and there are many actions we can point to that are making a difference in these domains.

As an example, on 24 October we will hold (this column is written before the event!) a joint event with the Australian Science Media Centre (the RACI is a foundation member) titled 'Introducing the News' – a beginner's guide to the way the news media works. Professor Emeritus Sir Gustav Nossal will join a group of experienced media professionals for the afternoon symposium to be held at Bio21 Institute in Melbourne. When members indicate the need for increased exposure and communication for chemists the media is very high in their thoughts. Dealing with the media is challenging – don't forget that the media is fast-moving; tomorrow's paper is blank today! It is important that we build partnerships with the media and get our message out. I hope that this event will be the first of many such around the country and an opportunity for us all to learn how to build a chemically literate society.

On the education front I was delighted to read an announcement (in a press release on 30 August 2006) from David Bartlett, MHA, Minister for Education in the Tasmanian Government, that the state government will be offering maths and science graduates permanent teaching jobs straight from university and is giving them access to scholarships that pay off their entire HECS debt. There are other incentives: to teach in remote areas and increased pay generally to offset the higher HECS debt carried by students of the practical sciences. The

'Future of Chemistry' project of the RACI recommended that government take initiatives to this end and this recommendation has been championed by the RACI. I don't expect that it was the RACI work alone that led to this result; however, I am convinced that the science community speaking clearly to government as one does get results. The RACI has been active in the community and it is great to see some positive steps taken.

One or two events will not of themselves change the world. However, as these actions build we will eventually reach a tipping point where we can look back and say that we did make a difference. The wonderful thing about the distributed working structure of the RACI is that you can be sure that each week, if not each day, something is happening around the country that is building on our position. It is a privilege to be a part of it!

This is my last column as President of the RACI. It has been an honour to have held the position and I wish to thank the many people who have supported and helped me over the last two years. The Executive Director, Elizabeth Gibson, has been a tower of strength and inspiration and above all an absolute pleasure to work with. The successive Board and Assembly members, with Dave Winkler as chair, have also been untiring in their efforts to build the RACI. I thank the many members who have offered advice and help, particularly through the 'Future of Chemistry' project, which was the highlight of my term of office. I thank Alison Green, Barry Noller, Graham Johnston and their committees for leadership on the international stage. I know that Ian Rae, the incoming President, will grow the RACI to the next level and I wish Ian all the best in that endeavour. As with most things, you get back more than you put in – I encourage you to take an active role in the RACI in the future to share in that return.

### Membership benefits: who to contact

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