



# ABNA EXCHANGE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIAN BIOSPECIMEN NETWORK ASSOCIATION

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**VICE PRESIDENT:** Beth Caruana

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**EDITOR:** Vacant – please enquire!

## Review of Human Tissue Laws: Discussion Paper (2025)

The Australian Law Reform Commission has just released the Discussion Paper in its Review of Human Tissue Laws. Make sure you add your perspectives and voice, [submissions](#) are invited until 23 January 2026.



## Contribute to the 2026 National Research Infrastructure (NRI) Roadmap Consultation

The 2026 NRI Roadmap Issues Paper is now open for consultation. Your input could help secure future investment in biobanking and cohort infrastructure.

Visit the NRI Consultation Portal [here](#) to access the issue paper and survey which closes on 1 December.

## Special Interest Groups Edition

In this edition of ABNA Exchange we highlight and provide an update on our Special Interest Groups (SIGs). These groups form the backbone of ABNA allowing members to share dedicated expertise and knowledge.

The aim is to provide ABNA members with an equal opportunity to:

- Network with biospecimen scientists and biobankers in diverse areas of agricultural, veterinary, human and ecological research – fostering collaboration and encouraging a one-health approach.
- Enhance and encourage the utilisation of data and specimen resources.
- Build relationships and collaborate with like-minded biospecimen scientists and biobankers within their field/sub-discipline, working towards shared goals and professional development.

We hope you enjoy reading and learning about the diverse and outstanding work being conducted by these groups and we encourage you to become involved. In this edition we also hear reflections from our two ABNA Emerging Leaders Scholarship winners, Helen Williams (Western Sydney Local Health District) and Ashley Rudge (Victorian Cancer Biobank).

**ABNA Exchange Committee:** Beth Caruana, Emma Dalziell, Maryam Hor, Louise Ludlow, Carmel Quinn and Georget Reaiche-Miller

**INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT  
IN CULTURALLY SAFE  
BIOBANKING &  
BIOSPECIMEN SERVICES**  
**SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP**



Our SIG met on the Friday morning and very quickly shook off any foggy heads from the conference dinner the night before with an engaging workshop to review upcoming work. The goal of our SIG is to improve processes that support culturally safe biobanking and following email exchanges earlier in the year substantial progress has been made. In collaboration with the wider membership, a questionnaire has been developed ahead of intended distribution to Australasian biobankers. The intention is to better understand;

- Current approaches to Indigenous engagement in biobanking
- Current challenges to improving Indigenous engagement
- Areas of uncertainty or unmet need
- Perceptions of challenges and obstacles

A draft questionnaire was circulated to the membership in March and in the months since has been reviewed and extended to include all the feedback. The most recent draft was shared at our workshop and discussed in depth to ensure that it is fit for purpose and will lead to robust data collection. We were delighted at the interactive nature of the room and the productive nature of the conversation. Since then, the questionnaire has been presented to a local review board of elders and Jess and I will be engaging with HREC in the near future.

We are thrilled to be undertaking this invaluable work and so grateful for the SIG community fuelling it! Once HREC approval has been gained, the next step will be to distribute the questionnaire far and wide and we will be grateful not only for input by our SIG community for data collection, but also for their assistance in sharing this within and beyond their networks.

We look forward to making contact with our membership as soon as we have updates to share, but in the meantime if anyone would like to get involved please contact us at the addresses below.

Jessica Buck [jessica.buck@thekids.org.au](mailto:jessica.buck@thekids.org.au)

Cass Griffin [Cassandra.griffin@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Cassandra.griffin@newcastle.edu.au)



*Indigenous Engagement and Culturally Safe Biobanking and Biospecimen Science co-chairs: Drs Jessica Buck and Cassandra Griffin*



The Post-Mortem Tissue Collection SIG met on Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> and we were absolutely delighted to have such a strong turnout. It was identified at the 2024 meeting that the Post-Mortem SIG would not necessarily need to be a group who met at scheduled intervals, but rather a network of colleagues that was established and ready to mobilise should a member have a question or see an opportunity for collaboration. With this in mind, it was wonderful to reconnect with colleagues!

The exercise proposed for the 2025 SIG meeting was to review a proposed survey of technical methodologies for brain biobanking. It was identified by SIG member Kaylee O'Brien from NSW Regional Biospecimen Services that there was vast variation in approaches to the collection, processing and storage of post-mortem brain tissue and she and co-chair Cassandra Griffin subsequently proposed an initiative to understand the scope of approaches being used across Australasian biobanks.

The group reviewed a preliminary list of questions, understanding that these questions would be input into a REDCap form once agreed. Discussion was engaging and resulted in the scope being broadened significantly to include consent and recruitment processes as well. There was also a call from SIG member Lisa Devereaux to extend the remit of the research beyond brain biobanking – at which point it was agreed that there could be an additional working group working in tandem. A number of members expressed interest in joining this working group.

Moving forward, the goals are to review the proposed data collection instrument in greater detail before circulating it to those who were in attendance for feedback and input.

We look forward to working with this group and would love to hear from any of our membership who have an interest in being involved!

Cass Griffin [Cassandra.griffin@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Cassandra.griffin@newcastle.edu.au)

Louise Ludlow [louise.ludlow@mcri.edu.au](mailto:louise.ludlow@mcri.edu.au)



# QUALITY MANAGEMENT & IMPROVEMENT

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP



The Quality Management & Improvement (QMI) SIG met on Thursday, 23rd October during the Conference and broke out into two groups to discuss initiatives in our currently thriving working groups: the Quality Manual Template & Laboratory Protocols and Method Development. Unfortunately we were unable to break out into the third group – **Sample Retention and Disposal** but there is still time to be part of the action (nudge nudge see the bottom of this page!)

## Quality Manual (QM) Template

The Quality Manual breakout session drew strong interest, with all 19 participants keen to develop a QM, but reported barriers such as time, expertise and lack of templates. The draft ABNA QM template was well received, with members requesting practical support such as an implementation guide, training modules and a peer support channel.

## Laboratory Protocols and Method Development

The Lab Protocols and Method Development breakout group discussed data and protocol harmonisation across biobanks, sourcing appropriate controls, safety guidance for sample handling and establishing a journal club.

The QMI SIG is looking forward to a productive 2026 where we will see even more activity in our working groups and release of resources. Please contact us at the addresses below to become involved!

Beth Caruana [beth.caruana@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:beth.caruana@health.nsw.gov.au)

Samantha Higgins [samantha.higgins@cancervic.org.au](mailto:samantha.higgins@cancervic.org.au)

## SAMPLE RETENTION & DISPOSAL WORKING GROUP

Are you looking for ways to effectively manage legacy collections? Then look no further than our Sample Retention and Disposal Working Group that is part of the Quality Management and Improvement SIG.

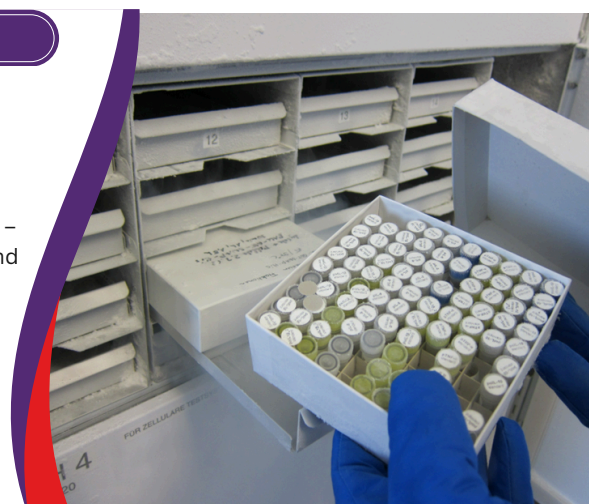
The Sample Retention and Disposal Working Group is focused on developing resources to support effective management and informed decision-making regarding the long-term storage of legacy specimens, as well as broader sample retention and disposal practices.

### WHAT WE'RE WORKING ON

- ✓ Recruitment of members
- ✓ Developing Guidelines & Checklists – Based on ABNA member insights and best-practice documents
- ✓ Resource Hub – Curating publicly accessible materials to support sample retention and disposal

### CONTACT US

✉ [u.powell@unsw.edu.au](mailto:u.powell@unsw.edu.au)





## Toolkit in the Making: Big Ideas, Bigger Impact!

Our SIG workshop at the 22<sup>nd</sup> ABNA Conference in Newcastle was a resounding success, with over 50 participants brainstorming our interactive workshop to co-create an outreach toolkit for different audiences. Three breakout groups tackled strategies for Donors & Public, Researchers, and Funders, generating practical tools to boost engagement, trust, and visibility.

### Key highlights:

- Donors & Public: Proposed culturally tailored consent models, flexible participation options, and communication tools such as brochures, videos, and social media campaigns to build trust and visibility.
- Researchers: Highlighted the need for a national searchable biobank database, transparent cost and quality messaging, and customisable outreach templates.
- Funders: governance priorities, and strategies for coordinated applications and clear ROI messaging tailored to different funders.

These insights will feed into a practical outreach toolkit for ABNA members, supporting education, advocacy, and engagement across stakeholder groups.

### What's next?

We're excited to announce that our SIG is updating its name to "Human Health Biobanking" to better reflect our evolving focus, broader scope, and shared goals.

In 2026, we'll continue to develop an ABNA outreach toolkit as well as other promotional resources, promote the adoption of the InFORMed consent template, and explore emerging topics including data sharing and AI in biobanking. We also aim to support SIG professional development by developing future workshops and online Q&A forum.

### Want to get involved?

We're looking for enthusiastic members to join our SIG and help shape the future of biobanking outreach!

Our team currently includes 24 active ABNA members from across Australia, and we meet quarterly, with extra sessions leading up to the ABNA Conference. Your ideas and participation will make a real impact—don't miss the chance to contribute to this important work!

**How to join:** Simply provide your contact details and reach out to our co-chairs:

Jennie Hui [jennie.hui@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:jennie.hui@health.wa.gov.au)

Wayne Ng [wayne.ng@cancervic.org.au](mailto:wayne.ng@cancervic.org.au)

Ilka Priebe [ilka.priebe@csiro.au](mailto:ilka.priebe@csiro.au)



*SIG co-Chairs (L to R): Jennie Hui and Ilka Priebe. Absent: Wayne Ng*



# A reflection of the ABNA 2026 conference

## Helen Williams

I didn't quite know what to expect at an ABNA conference. When I received a generous scholarship to attend, I was thrilled but also a little nervous. As a research scientist who has only just started banking samples, I felt a little out of my depth. What audience would I be sharing my work with? Would I understand any of the talks? Would it all be about technical aspects like freezers and robots? Would people laugh that I am calling my 19 samples a biobank? Would I find anything to share with the research community (like I said I would do in my application)?

Being prone to a low-level anxiety that manifests as excess preparation, I dug around for abstracts and programs from ABNA2024. I was struck by the variety of topics and the way the abstracts read. They seemed more vibrant than those of a 'normal' conference. More excited. More personal. There was also a theme, the session names and even those of abstracts had a common theme of musical genres and song titles. I knew then that ABNA was going to be different from the sort of conferences I usually attend.

Walking into Newcastle City Hall, I was warmly welcomed by Carmel. I grabbed my name badge and walked into the main room. I saw a big stage and a number of circular tables. Yes! I'd be able to take notes on my laptop. The chairs were arranged such that nobody would have to awkwardly twist to see the stage. Someone gave this some thought. I glanced around and didn't see anyone I knew (unsurprising) and so just chose a spot where I'd be able to keep an eye on my suitcase. It wasn't long before Aunty Theresa came to the stage to give her Welcome to Country. She left us with the words "It's never goodbye, always I'll see you again soon". This was the first of many moments where I personally related to what I was hearing, and felt a strong desire to share what I was hearing with my loved ones

Now, condensing my 40 pages (yes, truly) of notes into a couple of pages is impossible, and I suspect many of the readers would have been in attendance. So, I will simply list some things that fascinated, excited, or otherwise moved me. That museum specimens and Antarctic ice cores are a sort of biobank and can be used to tell us about our past and future is something I will be telling anyone who will listen. I have already told many people about the effectiveness of squeaky chickens at encouraging presenters to wrap things up. A person raising their hand is easier to dismiss than brightly coloured plastic chickens being waved at you, and the soft tinkle of a bell does not strike fear into the heart in the same way as a shrill squeak.

What did I learn? Biobankers like to share, not hoard. Trish told us that 80% of data never leaves the lab, of the data that leaves only 10% is actually used. I thought of my data from previous studies, sitting in the computer, gathering virtual dust. All the samples we've discarded upon study completion. At least I'm storing samples and data now! Biobankers do not like garbage. "Garbage in garbage out" was said more than once. A reminder to consider the sample and data quality. But biobankers are also trying to reduce garbage by trialing green initiatives. I have never heard this mentioned at any other conference. Biobankers like fun, and I was thrilled that the theme "Evolving through time" gave me an excuse to dress up for the 20s gala dinner. The premiere film on biobanking now, for the future was also a lot of fun and I am eager to share it.

In regard to organisation, I loved that the variety extended beyond the topics and to the people. The discussions on consent, unique considerations for Aboriginal people, and the way people wove in their personal stories, made me think about the people behind the samples, and what influences participation. The inclusion of Menti polls was a great way of enabling audience participation without the need for a microphone runner. The debate was fun and fiery (and made me want an ice cream SAMPLE- Thanks Cath). I am sure sponsors appreciated the option to give talks, something I rarely see at conferences. The networking (over delicious food) felt effortless, enabled partly by the room layout but mostly by the attendees. Everyone was approachable and happy to chat about what they were working on. The breakout to SIGs allowed detailed discussion on specific topics. The clinical trials SIG reinforced my feeling that researchers may be interested in biobanks but that there were barriers to engagement. I resolved to chat to more researchers about biobanks.

I walked away from this conference feeling I had made friends, been inspired, and learned so very much. I'll be proud to tell people "I am a biobanker" even if they give me weird looks. It'll be just the opening I need to then tell them about all the things we can learn if we start saving samples (and data) for the future. Then I'll return to ABNA in 2026 to see all of you (and the chickens) again for another amazing conference!



Colleagues Helen Williams and Virginia James



"Samples with data" win the debate!



Helen Williams enjoying the conference dinner!



Louise and Georget looking fierce with the squeaking chickens!

# A reflection of the ABNA 2026 conference

## Ashley Rudge

Starting in biobanking just four years ago, I would never have imagined being one of ABNA's 2025 Emerging Biobanking Leaders, having the opportunity to attend and present at this year's ABNA Conference in Newcastle.

Like many in this field, my entry into biobanking was unplanned. After being unsuccessful in entering a very competitive genetic counselling postgraduate degree, I found myself reconsidering my next steps. I applied for a Research Assistant role within the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre Tissue Bank, not knowing anything about biobanking but drawn to its unique blend of patient-facing and scientific work (pivoting from one niche field to another!). I've always loved science, but knew I didn't want to spend my career hidden behind the bench. My early volunteering at the Royal Children's Hospital and with Very Special Kids reinforced that it was important to me to keep a strong connection to our patients while working to improve cancer outcomes and lives.

Within my continuing time within the Peter MacCallum Tissue Bank, a member of the Victorian Cancer Biobank consortium, I became an "information sponge", absorbing the knowledge, ideas, and passions surrounding me. This mindset has opened doors I never expected: stepping into Assistant Manager after my first year, Acting Manager the next, and now currently sharing my operational time with an internal Project Manager, developing electronic consent across our 5 hospital-based, biobank consortium. This opportunity allowed me to attend and showcase my work at ISBER 2025 conference in Montreal to deepen my involvement in this constantly evolving field.

These experiences paved the way for what is now my largest professional milestone to date: receiving the 2025 ABNA Emerging Biobanking Leader Scholarship. Beyond the honour and encouragement this recognition brings, the scholarship also made it possible for me to attend my very first ABNA Conference in Newcastle earlier this year.

And what a conference it was. In just three days, ABNA delivered a rich and diverse program spanning population, disease, and ecological biobanking, alongside cutting-edge discussions on technology, ethics, governance, and participant engagement, each reflecting the breadth and rapid evolution of our biobanking landscape.

I was fortunate to present the insights and challenges seen within my electronic consent implementation project, with the opportunity to discuss with likeminded individuals to further improve and build upon current workflows. With this development in mind, I found Meaghan Toews' insights into the Tissue Act revision as well as Suranga Kasturi's presentation on AI and digital innovations within NSW Pathology incredibly valuable and exciting, with both talks sparking ideas about industry gaps and ideas to grow together across biobanks.



With my growing interest in strengthening the trust, experience, and representation of Indigenous Australians in biobanking and research, I was deeply moved and inspired by Rose Wadwell's session about her work within Indigenous communities and her perspective as a Gomeroi/Kamilaroi woman offered powerful and essential insights on how we can do better as an industry in creating a safe, engaging space for Indigenous Australians.

Lastly ending on a fun yet important presentation, Mark Curran's Antarctic ice-core research brought a sense of wonder to the room; it's not every day you hear about real-life time travel through the Earth's climate history!

Beyond the learning, what will stay with me most is the genuine warmth of the ABNA community. Attending my first ABNA conference alone from my organisation, I felt immediately welcomed. The atmosphere often felt like a reunion of old friends, even among people meeting for the first time. That sense of connection filled the Newcastle Town Hall and made the experience unforgettable.

Thank you to the ABNA management committee for awarding me this scholarship, not only have I gained knowledge and sparked motivation to improve, I feel welcomed into the Australasian community and I cannot wait to see what this next year brings.

23<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## From Collection to Discovery: Enabling Research, Accelerating Impact



australasian  
biospecimen  
network  
association

16 - 18  
September  
2026

HOBART

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 #ABNA2026Hobart

 [bit.ly/ABNA2026Hobart](https://bit.ly/ABNA2026Hobart)

# 5 Minutes with a Biobanker

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

This month Dr Nick Fountain-Jones, Lecturer of Public Health, [Tasmania and Antarctic One Health](#) and [The University of Tasmania](#) answers our questions.

We look forward to meeting Nick and colleagues when our ABNA conference comes to Hobart in 2026!



## THE QUICK QUESTIONS

**Are you left or right handed?**

Right

**Would you rather play it safe or risk it all?**

Risk it all

**Should pineapple go on pizza?**

Yes

I'm certainly not a puritan with what goes on pizza!

**Do you prefer to type or hand-write meeting notes?**

Depends on the meeting.

**Dark vs milk chocolate, which one would you chose?**

Dark chocolate, the darker the better

### 1. What was your first job in biobanking?

As a postdoc, I had the job curating and sorting disease data from the Serengeti Lion Project which was amazing. Alas I didn't get a field visit but learnt the true power of having biobanked samples to start to tease out long term disease dynamics.

### 2. How long has your biobank been operating and what is your 'elevator pitch' for your biobank/job?

I'm currently in the construction phase for an integrative One Health biobank for Tasmania that in the end should be able to link high-quality, ethically collected samples from wildlife, domestic animals, and people. We want to be able to link specimens with genomic, ecological, and health metadata to enable early detection of emerging pathogens and antimicrobial resistance and to understand how environmental change shapes transmission across species.

### 3. What is the craziest thing you have done to save a sample/s?

During my PhD, we were collecting samples in a pretty remote part of Tassie. Usually we had to walk 2km or so from a road to sample through very thick scrub. On one occasion though, a tree fell across our access road and we ended up walking an extra 12km in freezing cold rain just to collect 7 samples.

### 4. What has been your favourite moment (so far) in your biobanking career?

Having a reviewer at a journal pretty amazed that we had such large amounts of long term data to answer our key questions on wildlife health. This was only possible via biobanking efforts for over 20 years!

# Biobanking in the news

FROG ID WEEK: NOVEMBER 7-16

The annual Frog ID week took place earlier this month with many news outlets highlighting this citizen science event, so this month's 'Biobanking in the News' section is dedicated to frogs!

Each year, researchers ask the public to record local frog calls and submit them online, so the various species can be tracked Australia-wide, and the 'biobank' of Australian frog call recordings can be expanded. Dr Jodi Rowley from the Australian Museum heads up the event and was doing the rounds of radio interviews; examples of these can be found on the [ABC News website](http://www.abc.net.au) and the [2GB website](http://www.2gb.com), with full details of the initiative at [Frogid.net.au](http://Frogid.net.au)



Magnificent tree frog, *Litoria splendida*

Photo credit: Jodi Rowley, [Frogid.net.au](http://Frogid.net.au)

## THE STRANGE AND SORRY TALE OF THE SOUTHERN GASTRIC BROODING FROG



The southern gastric brooding frog, *Rheobatrachus silus*

Photo credit: Mike Tyler

Following the frog theme, the Sydney Morning Herald/The Age revisited a fascinating frog story this month. Back in the early 1970s a group of university students in SE Queensland discovered a bizarre frog which gave birth by vomiting its young directly out of its mouth. Their initial attempts to publish the phenomenon was rejected by Nature who believed that the 'southern gastric brooding frog' was in fact a hoax! The story continues to describe the efforts of the researchers to fight for the protection of the frogs' natural habitat, including an encounter with the infamous Queensland state premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, and ultimately the untimely demise of the species in the wild.

This is a cautionary tale where biobanking could perhaps have played a vital role in conservation of the species. Attempts to 'bring back' the frog via cloning is being considered, and there are some who still hold out hope that the frog may yet be rediscovered surviving in the wild. The full story can be found in the [Sydney Morning Herald](http://www.smh.com.au).

# SAVE THE DATE

**isber**  
GLOBAL BIOBANKING CONGRESS  
Shenzhen CHINA  
APRIL 21-23, 2026

If you come across any news stories that you'd like to highlight in the Biobanking in the News section of ABNA Exchange, please email [carmel.quinn@unsw.edu.au](mailto:carmel.quinn@unsw.edu.au)

If you have any suggestions for a short article for ABNA Exchange, please contact: [info@abna.org.au](mailto:info@abna.org.au)

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