



# ABNA EXCHANGE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIAN BIOSPECIMEN NETWORK ASSOCIATION

**PRESIDENT:** Louise Ludlow

**TREASURERS:** Jennie Hui, Catherine Kennedy

**DIGITAL MEDIA OFFICERS:** Ussha Pillai, Helen Tsimiklis

**ORDINARY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:** Emma Dalziell, Chris Gorman, Samantha Higgins, Maryam Hor, Vivien Lau, Yingshi (Kiki) Li, Georget Reaiche-Miller (Past President), Ashley Rudge, Leanne Wallace

**VICE PRESIDENT:** Beth Caruana

**SECRETARY:** Carmel Quinn

**EDITOR:** Vacant – please enquire!

## New Horizons Await!

It is with enthusiasm and honour that I step into the role of President. I am excited about the journey ahead and the opportunities that lie before us! I started my current role as Children's Cancer Center Biobank Manager at Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Royal Children's Hospital in 2013. I was a researcher with little knowledge about the field of biobanking. At the annual conference, Lisa Devereux and the ABNA community took me under their wing providing support, networking opportunities and knowledge sharing. To me, this collegiality represents the essence of ABNA and inspires my commitment to this incredible association.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to our previous President Dr Georget Reaiche-Miller. Thank you for your energy and expertise in guiding and mentoring me as Vice President. Your dedication and commitment have been instrumental in the success of ABNA. Thank you to the Past Presidents whose visionary leadership have made ABNA the remarkable organisation that it is today. We are thrilled to introduce Dr. Beth Caruana as ABNA's new Vice President.

Our 22<sup>nd</sup> conference in Newcastle "Biobanking Evolving Through Time" was an incredible success promoting the best of biobanking in the Australasian region and fostering meaningful connections and collaboration. Professor Jennifer Byrne received the second bi-annual ABNA Achievement in Australasian Biobanking Award, congratulations!

My vision is to continue providing the opportunity for our membership to come together to share knowledge, foster collaboration and promote innovation. Together, we remain steadfast in our commitment to upholding ABNA's values and vision, and I look forward with great anticipation to leading ABNA toward even greater growth and continued accomplishment.

As we turn the page to new horizons, I invite each of you to join me in driving ABNA's continued success and I look forward to what we can achieve together.

Don't forget to save the date for our annual meeting in 2026, Hobart here we come!

 Louise Ludlow 

# Introducing the 2025/2026 Management Committee

## OFFICE BEARERS



PRESIDENT  
Louise Ludlow



VICE PRESIDENT  
Beth Caruana



PAST PRESIDENT  
Georget Reaiche-Miller



SECRETARY  
Carmel Quinn



TREASURER  
Jennie Hui



TREASURER  
Catherine Kennedy



DIGITAL MEDIA OFFICER  
Ussha Pillai



DIGITAL MEDIA OFFICER  
Helen Tsimiklis

## ORDINARY MEMBERS



Emma Dalziell



Chris Gorman



Samantha Higgins



Maryam Hor



Vivien Lau



Yingshi (Kiki) Li



Ashley Rudge



Leanne Wallace

The ABNA Management Committee welcomes four new members:

Maryam Hor, Vivien Lau, Yingshi (Kiki) Li and Ashley Rudge

# 2025 Award and Prize Winners

The quality of the abstract submissions, posters and oral presentations was of a very high standard and our judging panel had their work cut out for them.

Congratulations to our award and prize winners:

## Achievement in Australasian Biobanking Award

- Jennifer Byrne

Our second bi-annual Achievement in Australasian Biobanking Award was awarded to Jennifer Byrne – congratulations!



2025 Achievement in Australasian Biobank Award recipient Jennifer Byrne

## Emerging Leader in Biobanking Scholarships

- Ashley Rudge
- Helen Williams

## Rapid Fire Presentation Prize

- Rose Upton

## Elevator Pitch Prize as voted by the Sponsors!

- Alana McGrath

## Eppendorf Best Poster Presentation Award

- Ilze Simpson

## "Newcastle Olympics" (and bragging rights)

- GOLD: Lisa Devereux
- SILVER: Beth Caruana
- BRONZE: Megan Clarke



2025 Prize Winners: 1. Rapid Fire Presentation Prize winner Rose Upton. 2: Elevator Prize winner Alana McGrath. 3: Eppendorf Best Poster Prize winner Ilze Simpson.

**BIOBANKING**  
**EVOLVING**  
**THROUGH**  
**TIME**

Newcastle  
October 22 - 24  
2025

#ABNA2025Newcastle [bit.ly/ABNA2025Newcastle](http://bit.ly/ABNA2025Newcastle)

## CONFERENCE ORGANISING COMMITTEE



GEORGET  
REICHE-MILLER



LOUISE  
LUDLOW



CASSANDRA  
GRIFFIN



CHRIS  
GORMAN



ANUSHA  
HETTIARATCHI



CATHERINE  
KENNEDY



USSHA PILLAI  
POWELL



CARMEL  
QUINN



HELEN  
TSIMIKLIS



LEANNE  
WALLACE



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# Thank you to our 2025 Sponsors & Invited Speakers



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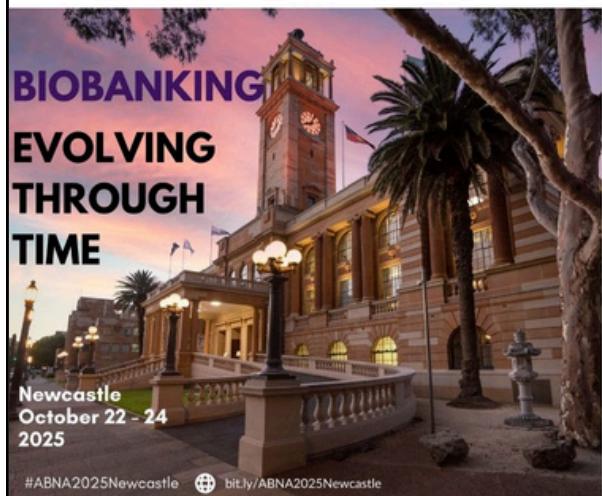
## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



GREGORY  
GROSSMAN



DEBRA LEIOLANI  
GARCIA



## INVITED SPEAKERS



HEATH  
BADGER



ALEX  
CALLEN



MARTINA  
CHIAREZZA



MARK  
CURRAN



NATHALIE  
DOUCET



MATT  
DUNN



ASHLEE  
DUNN



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SOMMERVILLE



BENTE TALSETH-  
PALMER



MAEGHAN  
TOEWS



MAIKEN  
UELAND



ROSE  
WADWELL



RHYS  
WILLIAMS



australian  
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network  
association

# 5 Minutes with a Biobanker

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

This month Professor Jo Dickinson, Principal Research Fellow Human Genetics, Functional Genomics Group at the University of Tasmania answers our questions.

We look forward to meeting Jo and her team when our ABNA conference comes to Hobart in 2026!



## THE QUICK QUESTIONS

**Are you left or right handed?**

Left

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

Play it safe. I worry that a risk it all approach can have unintended detrimental impacts on others.

**Should pineapple go on pizza?**

No, no, no!

Never, never, never there are no excuses

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

Depends on the meeting.

Informal meetings I am a hand written notes person.

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

Milk

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

As my first post-doctoral position, I worked with Professor David Mackey, a pioneer in eye disease biobanking in Australia.

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

Biobanking at the Menzies Institute for Medical Research has been ongoing for >25 years. Whilst there is not yet one co-ordinated biobank in Tasmania, major research programs receiving international recognition have been enabled by biobanking pioneers including those in multiple endocrine neoplasia, genetic eye diseases, multiple sclerosis, and prostate cancer.

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

Spent the early hours of a morning re-housing samples after a cool room compressor failure heated the room to over 30 degrees.

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

My own research field involves the discovery of high risk genes contributing to inherited rare disease. My favourite moments are those that exemplify the generosity, altruism and the commitment of our Tasmanian community to our work. One of many stories is a home visit to collect samples for biobanking from two elderly brothers living in rural Tasmania. Our team arrived to find that a huge family gathering was underway, all of whom had been invited to attend this lavish afternoon tea for the purposes of meeting our team and discussing their possible donation of a sample for biobanking.

# 2025 Conference Highlights

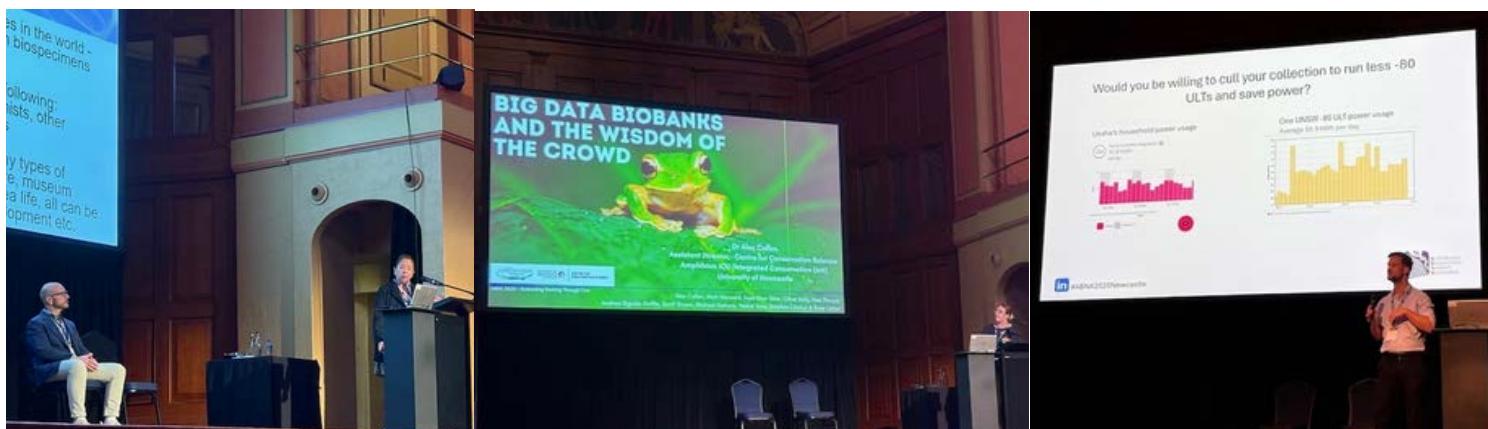
Carmel Quinn

It's difficult to believe that after all the hard work and buildup, another ABNA conference has now been and gone. This time the ABNA community were welcomed to the beautiful city of Newcastle, NSW, with its beaches, waterfront views and many, many fabulous local spots for eating, drinking and socialising, which were well patronised over the week. With the overarching theme "Biobanking - Evolving Through Time" featuring sessions held in the ornate setting of Newcastle City Hall, a gala dinner in the elegant surroundings of a converted church, and a site visit to a contemporary gin distillery, the conference was both informative and enjoyable throughout.



*A peek into Newcastle City Hall where the ABNA 2025 sessions were held.*

We were honoured to be joined by biobanking royalty in the form of our keynote speakers, current and past ISBER Presidents respectively, Gregory Grossman and Debra Leiolani Garcia. They kicked off proceedings on day one with a two-part keynote presentation: Deb delivered a comprehensive retrospective of biobanking history and evolution, with Greg delving into new, emerging biobanking paradigms including the recognition and convergence of biobanking from across disciplines (think human health, environmental, microbial), and the rise of data (more about that later...)



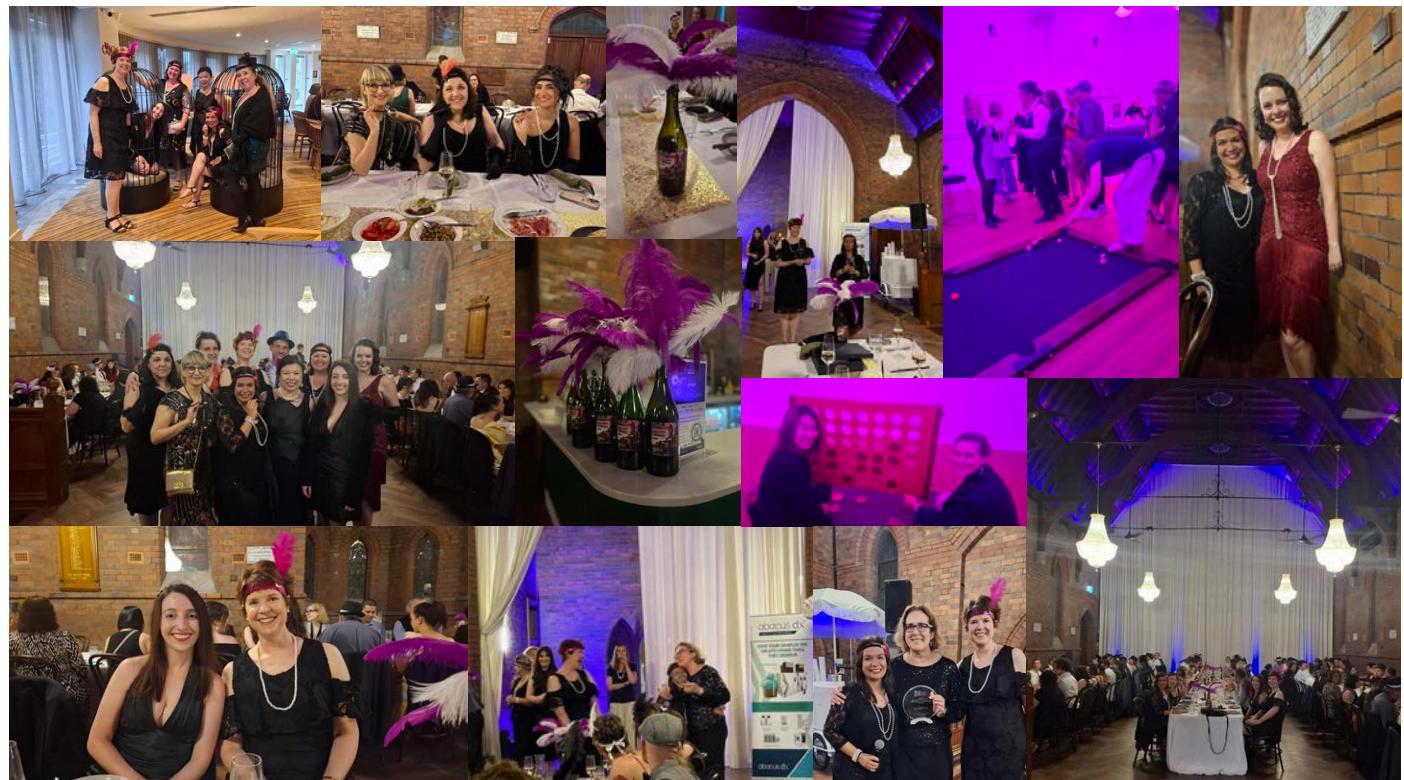
*Keynote speakers Gregory Grossman and Deb Garcia (left); Alex Callen discusses frog-call data collection with help from citizen scientists (middle); Chris Gorman facilitates a 'Sustainability in Biobanking' workshop (right).*

Day one continued in true ABNA fashion with fascinating presentations suggesting honeybees as natural biobankers, using ancient DNA techniques to understand population genetics of the critically endangered Northern hairy-nose wombats, and enlisting citizen scientists to compile collections of frog calls in the wild; these combined with human health related topics including a description of Indonesia's Biomedical and Genome Science Initiative (BGSi) biobank, and the increasing value of clinical trial specimens and data for secondary research, illustrated by presentations from the Trans-Tasman Radiation Oncology Group (TROG) and the Breast Cancer Trials (BCT) biobank. A further highlight from day one was the sustainability workshop - a chance for biobankers to consider and swap ideas about what can be realistically done to improve our environmental footprint.



Scenes from 'The Great ABNA Debate'

Despite being a hard act to follow, talks continued after the debate covering topics as wide ranging as taphonomic research (studying how the human body breaks down after death), native seed banking, ice cores from the Antarctic, and the frog skin microbiome. A packed day was topped off by a sumptuous 'Roaring Twenties' themed gala dinner which included the presentation of the bi-annual "ABNA Achievement in Australasian Biobanking" award, to the fully deserving Jennifer Byrne.



The ABNA 2025 Gala Dinner - The "Roaring Twenties", with decor featuring ABNA's signature purple.

Beginning early with a biobanker speed dating breakfast, day two continued with a packed and varied program, including an early talk discussing the importance of developing trust in AI, particularly for First Nations peoples, if this is to be used effectively in improving healthcare delivery. A workshop about biobanking roles and career development followed, hosted by Jennifer Byrne and Deb Garcia, lending their extensive experience and facilitating discussion on how members of the audience may be able to progress their careers in the biobanking space. Then followed a meeting highlight - "The Great ABNA Debate" where two opposing teams entertained and persuaded with their arguments about whether samples are more important than data (Jenny Byrne and Cath Kennedy, led by Deb Garcia), or, data is more important than samples (Gregory Grossman leading the team of Rodrigo Hamede and Alex Callen). Both sides presented compelling arguments, but the inclusion of a fair bit of sledging and the odd dirty trick ensured an hilarious session. Although the audience poll declared the 'samples' team the eventual winners, everyone present was fully aware that in isolation, rarely can samples or data alone effect the research outcomes required.

An 8.30am start on the final day of the meeting (who's idea was that?!) saw somewhat bleary-eyed delegates rock up for more compelling presentations. Day three began with a well-pitched talk from the Australian Law Reform Commission on plans to harmonise and nationalise human tissue laws, an introduction to the 'Wild Yeast Zoo', and an illuminating talk on the responsible use of AI by NSW Health Pathology - their focus being on building AI-driven systems rather than AI tools. The potential for secondary use of health research data though the HeSANDA project was presented, followed by an ABNA-style pivot to the topic of transmissible tumours in the Tasmanian Devil.

The final few presentations featured GenV - a newborn and parent cohort, the development of biobanking in Pakistan at the Indus Hospital and Health Network, efforts to eradicate the Australian Saltmarsh Mosquito, the description of a cancer sample and data sharing platform (the NCCP), and that of the Australian Health Biobank, a national population biobank, intended as a foundational asset for research in Australia. The afternoon was rounded out by the site visit to a local gin distillery for a tour and a talk around how they use botanicals, many of which are Australian natives, accompanied by some sampling of their wares for those who chose to do so (including yours truly).



*The ABNA 2025 site visit to the EARP Distillery.*

Just to wrap up, I'd like to apologise for not being able to represent every one of the fantastic presentations within this summary – there were a record number of abstracts submitted this year, with many excellent rapid-fire and poster presentations as a result. Also, I can't finish up without mentioning that during the meeting we were privileged to witness the first public showing of the inspirational ISBER video to promote Global Biobanking Awareness Week in 2026 (and featuring our very own ABNA Past President, Cassandra Griffin) – this will certainly not be the last we hear on this topic over coming months! And finally, please save the date for ABNA 2026 which will be held in fabulous Hobart, 16-18 September – planning is already underway and we hope to see you all there!

**23<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

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

**16 - 18  
September  
2026**

**HOBART**

**SAVE THE DATE**



# Where FAIR meets CARE

## Reflections from International Data Week 2025

INTERNATIONAL  
DATA WEEK  
13-16 October 2025  
Brisbane, Australia

Georget Reache-Miller

As highlighted throughout the ABNA seminar series and showcased during the Great Debate at our conference, data and samples are inseparable – one is only as valuable as the other. You can't have meaningful samples without data, and data without samples loses its context and purpose. This interdependence was clearly echoed at International Data Week, where the connection between data and samples was a central theme.

International Data Week (IDW) 2025, held from 13-16 October in Brisbane, brought together global leaders in data science, research, and infrastructure under the theme "Data for Positive Change: Empowering Communities and Advancing Research." The event combined the Research Data Alliance's 25th Plenary and SciDataCon sessions. The event featured four plenary sessions and multiple concurrent sessions, with some time slots hosting up to ten breakout sessions simultaneously, reflecting the depth and diversity of topics discussed, and a series of workshops and networking opportunities focused on how data can drive meaningful and ethical impact.

A key highlight throughout the week was the strong focus on the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) and CARE (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) principles. While the FAIR principles remain foundational for ensuring data are well-managed, interoperable, and reusable, the CARE framework complements them by centring Indigenous data governance and the ethical use of data. Sessions emphasised that data stewardship must consider not only infrastructure and accessibility but also respect, equity, and shared benefit for the communities from whom data originate.



Image Source: [GIDA](#)

Many discussions drew parallels between data management and sample management, highlighting how both face remarkably similar challenges. Whether managing digital datasets or physical samples, the underlying needs are the same; robust provenance, clear governance, interoperability, and ethical frameworks to guide sharing and reuse. Both domains require strong metadata, consistent standards, and thoughtful policies to ensure long-term accessibility and trust. The interplay between FAIR and CARE offers a valuable model that can be applied equally to biological samples, ensuring both scientific and ethical integrity in their use.

Beyond the technical discussions, IDW2025 also provided plenty of opportunities for connection and fun. Brisbane's warm hospitality, food and riverfront setting created a lively atmosphere that fostered collaboration and conversation well beyond the conference rooms.



Overall, IDW2025 reinforced that effective data and sample stewardship requires not only good systems and standards but also a commitment to fairness, responsibility, and shared benefit. The lessons from this year's event serve as a timely reminder that aligning our own practices with FAIR and CARE principles can strengthen both our operational effectiveness and our ethical foundations.

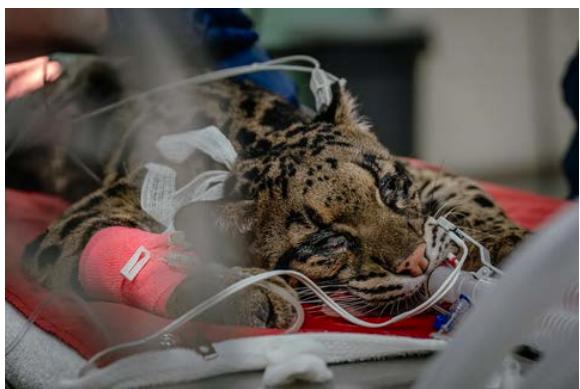
# Biobanking in the news

## Biobanked cohorts play essential role in major depression study

A study led by researchers from QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute utilising DNA from five international cohorts, featured in the *Guardian* this month. The original research, published in *Nature Communications*, found that women carry a higher genetic risk of depression, with 16 genetic variants found to be linked to depression in women with only 8 in men. For more details, and to link to the original research paper, see the full story on the [Guardian website](#).



## A groundbreaking new blood bank for exotic species



River, a clouded leopard, has blood taken during a routine health check *Image credit: Jamie Kelter Davis, the New York Times*

This heart melting image of a clouded leopard headlines a fascinating story in the *SMH* and the *Age*, about efforts to establish a blood bank for zoos and aquariums. During COVID, when the virus jumped into different animal species, it transpired that clouded leopards were particularly susceptible, developing life-threatening anaemia which required blood transfusions. However, despite best efforts at the time, this resource was rarely available and some of the clouded leopards could not be saved. This prompted a vet based at Brookfield Zoo in Chicago to drive efforts towards the creation of a frozen blood bank for exotic species. The story can be found in the [Good Weekend magazine online](#).

## Citizen scientists and a 'Backyard Biobank' for Tasmanian alpine plants

A scientist living in Hobart has taken it upon himself to introduce a 'Backyard Biobank', in a bid to protect Tasmanian alpine plant species from extinction. Climate change is increasing the bush fire risk in alpine areas and in anticipation of this, hundreds of cuttings from alpine plants are being distributed to anyone who is willing to grow and look after them. A ready supply of these plants may prove crucial in the event of catastrophic bush fires, particularly as seeds from many of these species do not thrive after storage. So far over 200 people have taken cuttings which are now distributed around southern Tasmania, with interest in taking part continuing to grow. The full story, including pictures of several striking alpine species, can be found on the [ABC News website](#).



Cushion plants in Tasmanian alpine areas, forming a mat-like structure *Image credit: Tourism Tasmania*

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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