

DIOXIN 2012



Introduction

The 32nd International Symposium on Halogenated Persistent Organic Pollutants – Dioxin 2012 – was held August 26th–31st at the Cairns Convention Centre (CCC) in Cairns, Australia.

The 32nd Dioxin Symposium marked two firsts in its history, being hosted for the first time in Australia and the first in the Southern Hemisphere. Despite the unfortunate timing of Australia's strengthening dollar against economic downturns elsewhere, we were pleased to welcome nearly 600 delegates, accompanying persons, sponsors and exhibitors from 39 countries. In line with our commitment to encourage student participation in the Symposium, we were able to offer reduced registration to 32 student volunteers, bringing the total number of students attending the Symposium to over 100. The Symposium was supported by a large number of sponsors and exhibitors who contributed significantly to the overall success. We were also delighted to secure sponsorship to provide free registration to 9 scientists from developing and transition countries.

At Dioxin 2008 in Birmingham, the IAB decided that Dioxin 2012 would be crossing the equator to Queensland, Australia. However, a decision still had to be made between the State capital, Brisbane, and the city of Cairns 1,600 km to the north, located on the doorstep to the Great Barrier Reef and World Heritage tropical rainforests. After a number of site visits and an enthusiastic vote, the Cairns Convention Centre was selected in April 2011.



Cairns Convention Centre, opening address and student volunteers (photos: Y.Kunimi & T.Nakano)

Administration of the conference was taken on by the Conference co-Chairs Jochen Mueller and Caroline Gaus, with the help of Conference Coordinator, Sharon Grant, and significant assistance from Kristina Goot and an outstanding team of student volunteers. A Professional Conference Organiser, MCI Australia, was appointed to manage several of the organisational aspects of the conference, including the trade exhibition, Symposium website, on-line short paper management system and on-line registration. Our grateful thanks go to a large number of people who were involved in the mammoth task of organising the conference. Their hard work and support ensured an enjoyable and successful Dioxin 2012.

Scientific Programme

We were pleased to welcome Seith Fourmile to the opening ceremony to deliver a Welcome to Country, acknowledging and respecting the traditional Aboriginal custodians of the land of the Cairns region. Storytelling is an important part of the Aboriginal culture and delegates were regaled with stories of the local indigenous people told through dance, music and film. Delegates were then entertained by the novel drawings of sand artist, Brett Bower, recreating iconic Australian images in sand.

The scientific programme opened with a duo plenary session by Martin Van den Berg and Mike Denison on "Understanding the risks of dioxins". Shin-Ichi Sakai, Laurence McCook, (who kindly stood in for Katharina Fabricius at short notice) and Aiqian Zhang presented the plenary sessions on subsequent days. Over the week, there were a total of 41 scientific sessions, with 248 oral and 198 poster presentations. Presenters came from around the globe with 47% from Asia followed by Europe (28%), North America (12%), Oceania (10%), Africa (2%) and South America (1%). Topics addressed covered the broad range of core topics on analytical and environmental chemistry, environmental and human toxicology, epidemiology, exposure assessment, as well as regulation, risk assessment and management. As always, the Symposium also included a range of special sessions that covered emerging global and current regional environmental and human health issues related to POPs.

To encourage discussion and interaction, posters were kept on display for the duration of the Symposium and social drinks were served at each of the three evening poster sessions. The posters presented by students nominated for the Otto Hutzinger Award were moved outside to the open deck each evening to provide additional space for drinks and discussion.

The standard of student presentations was, as usual, very high and six Otto Hutzinger awards were made for student oral and poster sessions from 79 entries.

The Symposium closed on Friday with a series of six short-plenary talks discussing state-of-the-art and future challenges, by Nobuyoshi Yamashita, Michael McLachlan, Jacob de Boer, Antonia Calafat, Linda Birnbaum, and Guibin Jiang. The chair of Dioxin 2013, Jae-Ho Yang, subsequently invited delegates to in Daegu, South Korea for the following year.

Social Programme

The Symposium was set in the tropical city of Cairns, situated on the coast between the reef and rainforest, which provided a perfect backdrop for the social events of the week. The traditional Sunday evening informal reception was held in the Cairns Convention Centre and delegates were given the opportunity to meet several of the local residents: the freshwater crocodile, carpet python, tawny frogmouth and the quintessential koala.



Social events – (left to right) Koala at the Sunday informal drinks, Monday Welcome reception dining outdoors at Salt House and Gala Dinner dragonflies, dancing & can-can at The Tanks (photos: Y.Kunimi, T.Nakano)

On Monday evening, delegates were invited to dine under the stars in true Aussie style at the welcome reception held at Salt House on the Cairns waterfront. Panoramic views of the ocean, a buffet featuring regional delicacies and live music created a great atmosphere to celebrate the start of the 2013 Symposium.

Two tours were offered for the Wednesday afternoon excursions. A large group of delegates headed out by boat to visit the Great Barrier Reef at Green Island. The afternoon was spent investigating the reef flora and fauna whilst snorkelling and swimming. A second group took a cable car trip over the world heritage listed tropical rainforest canopy and deep into the forest on the Kuranda Skyrail Experience.



Wednesday tours – Green Island reef and Kuranda rainforest Skyrail (photos: Y.Kunimi, T.Nakano, K.Goot)

On Wednesday, we were fortunate to have everyone join us at the Symposium Gala in the Rainforest Dinner. An evening of entertainment was staged at The Tanks Arts Centre, set amidst tropical rainforest. Delegates were met by a group of dragonflies and enjoyed drinks under the trees. After the meal, a fluorescent can-can troupe kicked off the evening entertainment followed by dancing until late with a live band.

Acknowledgements

Organising a successful Dioxin Symposium requires hard work and commitment from a large number of people. Besides the remarkable efforts of our Local Organising Committee, we are particularly grateful to the IAB (particularly Mike Denison and Heidi Fiedler), staff and students at Entox and the University of Queensland who supported our efforts, our great team of student volunteers and the staff of the Cairns Convention Centre. In addition, we extend our gratitude to the Session Chairs who worked within tight deadlines and made a critical contribution to achieve an informative and stimulating scientific program. We also thank the plenary speakers for their captivating and well received presentations. Our final thanks go to all the sponsors and exhibitors who supported this Symposium and were a vital part of its overall success. And on a personal note, we'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Brock Chittim and his team at Wellington for all their support, help and creativity.

Jochen Mueller and Caroline Gaus – Symposium Chairs