

Rob Russell attended Science meets Parliament (SmP) event in Canberra, 20th – 21st June 2011. He is employed as a research scientist at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), and his attendance was sponsored by the CPSU/CSIRO Staff Association.

Attending SmP2011 was a great opportunity to learn how science fits into the political process, and how to communicate our research through the media and to politicians. The first day involved meeting researchers from all areas of science. There were panel discussions with journalists and science communicators, and we were encouraged to distil our research into a short and interesting message. It was a good environment to reflect on what we do and why, and what are the outcomes that the public would value.

The dinner at Parliament House saw the launch of “Respect the Science” campaign by Science and Technology Australia (formerly FASTS) and the talk given by John Brumby was interesting, given the uncertain funding situation of the Australian Synchrotron by the current Victorian Liberal government.

The second day included enlightening talks on the ARC’s Excellence in Research Australia project and by the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator, The Hon Kim Carr. We were also treated to attend the National Press Club Address by the Chief Scientist Ian Chubb, with introduction by ANSTO’s Professor Richard Bannati. Descending on Question Time in the afternoon, we were treated to the amusing and slightly embarrassing antics of both sides of Parliament in the House of Representatives. Prior to meeting with the Federal Member for Hughes, Mr Craig Kelly, I enjoyed the opportunity to wander the corridors of Parliament offices and admire the many artworks not normally seen by the public! The meeting itself included another researcher from ANSTO (not surprising given ANSTO is in Mr Kelly’s electorate) and from Deakin University, and we were able to provide a brief introduction to our research and its impact on society. This was well received and in a thank you email I urged him to encourage his colleagues to be involved in future SmP events to allow more contact between scientists and politicians.



Britta Denise Hardesty, Rob Russell and Sarah Perkins at the Gala Dinner, Parliament House. (Image credit: Lorna Sim / Science & Technology Australia)