



**Victorian Branch**

Annual Report 2020

## Welcome

Last year presented a number of challenges for the Vic Branch and many of our members. We tried our best to adapt to the changing circumstances and put on a range of events that were still of interest and accessible to our members. The transition to an online-only format was reasonably smooth and it was certainly nice to see members from other states at our events.



Thank you to all members, both Victorian and nationally, who attended our 2020 events. We hope to see you at our events in 2021 too, preferably in person! Our event planning occurs throughout the year, so if there are particular events, workshops, or topics that you would like to see, please get in touch with us at [vic.branch@statsoc.org.au](mailto:vic.branch@statsoc.org.au) with your ideas.

Ben Harrap,  
Secretary

## Acknowledgement of country

The Victorian Branch of the Statistical Society of Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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## Words from the President

I can say, in all honesty, that 2020 was a year like no other. Faced with lockdowns and other restrictions we did well to continue our usual activities, now in an online format. Better yet, we expanded the number and range of activities. As a result we welcomed many new members, growing our total to a record-breaking **300 members**. I am proud of the way the Council and SSA members rose to the challenge of staying connected during the pandemic year.



### Our year in brief

COVID-19 hit us right from the beginning, with our Branch moving to online talks and social events without skipping a beat. We discovered some unexpected benefits to being online. No longer limited by geography, 2020 was a year of national and global collaboration.

Our second talk of the year was on the very timely topic of COVID-19 modelling. It attracted over 200 people, including a substantial number from **interstate and internationally**. We rarely see such high attendance except at special events like our Belz Lectures.

We explored **creative ideas for events** and ways to run activities online, including a virtual trivia night, virtual post-event socialising, and even a statistics-themed comedy show in lieu of our annual Belz Dinner.

I was delighted to hear from some of our **regional members**, who said that they felt more connected with the SSA this year than they ever have in the past. I hope to see us maintain this wider connection in the future, even as we slowly return a more 'usual' event offering.

We continued our diverse **workshops** offering, this year adding a workshop on Julia into the mix. In switching to an online format, our workshops also became more accessible, not only by being open to those who would not otherwise attend in person, but also by being much cheaper. On top of this, we were able to offer substantial financial support to our members.

Our focus on **diversity** from last year continued successfully into 2020. We ran a similarly varied set of event topics and sizes, and 'automatically' achieved geographic diversity via running them online. Of the 31 speakers we invited to our monthly events, 15 were non-male, which got us very close to our target of 50% for gender diversity.

Our Belz Lecture was particularly special this year, coinciding with **World Statistics Day**, a five-yearly international celebration of the importance of official statistics. It was fantastic to hear from **Teresa Dickinson**, Deputy Australian Statistician and leader of the 2021 Census, who spoke to us about trust in official statistics and the institutions that report them.

## A renewed Purpose

These past two years have been one of reflection and renewal for our Branch. In 2019 we implemented a new Strategic Plan that focused our efforts on boosting and meeting the needs of members. Across that time, our actions have been effective, with membership rising from around 240 at the end of 2018, to 300 members in late 2020.

In Nov 2020, we updated our official Purpose to broaden our focus (once again) on the statistics discipline and profession as a whole, not just the needs of our members. I look forward to our Branch continuing to make this broader impact on our community.

## Behind the scenes

I am delighted to see our operational improvements bearing fruit. All our activities are made possible by volunteers, including the Council members and council supporters that you have met during 2020. We have innovated in how we run our meetings to allow more discussion and engagement, our event coordination roles are being shared more evenly than in the past, and we provide substantial support and coaching for new volunteers.

We have several long-term initiatives in the works, some of which we have already begun, including in cooperation with our national body. Operational improvements ensure that we make best use of the valuable time and insight committed by our volunteers.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the University of Melbourne and Monash University for their continued in-kind support throughout the year.

Finally, I wish to personally thank our dedicated and enthusiastic Council members. In this, my final year as President, I am proud of our cohesive and supportive team, who deliver such value to our profession and the community. I look forward to us emerging out of lockdown in 2021, ready to advance statistics even further.

Damjan Vukcevic,  
President

## About us

The Victorian Branch of the Statistical Society of Australia (SSA Vic) is a professional association representing statisticians in Victoria and Tasmania. We were founded in 1964. We are one of six state branches of the Statistical Society of Australia, which was founded in 1962.

### Purpose<sup>1</sup>

SSA Vic enables statisticians to make an impact on Victorian community and industry by supporting them over the life of their careers and raising awareness of their vital contributions to public discussion. We provide a link between our members and broader national statistical activities.

### Principles

- Our core membership comprises those that identify as statisticians
- We recruit and retain students, early, mid and senior career statisticians
- We draw on the skills and knowledge of our members in order to maximise our impact
- We offer a diverse range of activities and resources in order to be inclusive of all statisticians
- We make thoughtful and efficient use of volunteer contributions

### Goals for 2020



<sup>1</sup> In Nov 2020, we changed this at a Special General Meeting to: **The Purpose of the Branch is to advance the study and practice of statistics.**

# Our people

## Council

**Damjan Vukcevic**, President

**Emi Tanaka**, Vice-President

**Ben Harrap**, Secretary

**Lizzie Korevaar**, Treasurer

**Rheanna Mainzer**, Membership Officer

**Hien Nguyen**, Communications Officer

**Lidija Turkovic**, Deputy Secretary

**Kohleth Chia**, Deputy Membership Officer

**Patrick Robotham**, Industry Representative

**Daniel Fryer**, Early Career and Student Statisticians Representative

## Volunteers

Anna Quaglieri



## Strategy Committee (summer 2020-2021)

Kohleth Chia  
Daniel Fryer  
Ben Harrap  
Lizzie Korevaar  
Emi Tanaka  
Kevin Wang

## Advisory Committee

Sandy Clarke-Errey  
Ian Gordon  
Lyle Gurrin  
Michael Phillips

## Auditor

Daryl Daley

## Membership report

In 2020 the number of SSA Vic members increased from 275 in February, to 299 in November, with a total of 107 new members joining our Branch throughout the year. The number of members in our branch hit an all-time high of 300 in mid-October during the lead up to the Belz Lecture, but dipped back below 300 in November. At the end of 2020, our Branch consisted of 193 full members, 82 student members, and 24 members in other categories (retired, transitional, perpetual and honorary).

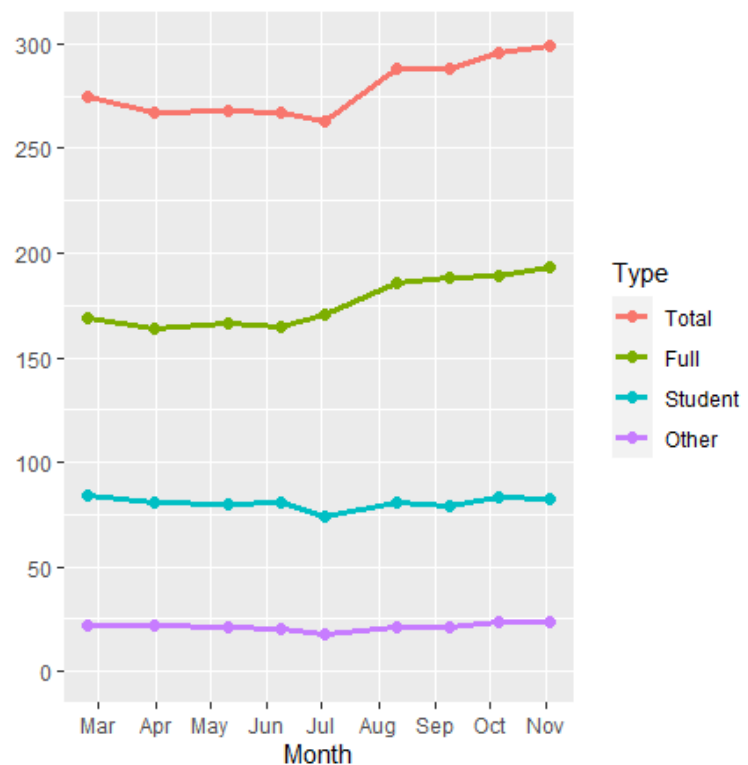


Despite not being able to meet in person, we ran several initiatives throughout the year to give back to our members, including funding virtual conference attendance and discounts on workshops. We also ran a recruitment drive targeting senior and influential statisticians late in the year.

A special mention goes to my fellow membership officer Kohleth Chia, whose hard work behind the scenes has led to an improved process for summarising and reporting membership data. This initiative will enhance our ability to make evidence-based decisions regarding our membership strategy, such as how to best recruit and retain members at all membership levels, and how to improve membership value.

Rheanna Mainzer,  
Membership Officer

Number of SSA Vic members across 2020





## Member achievements & highlights

We wish to celebrate the professional and personal successes of our members, across the different walks of life and levels of seniority.

Many of our members have been particularly active within our Society. We would like to highlight some of them:

- **Alison Harcourt** was granted Honorary Life Membership in recognition of her inspiring career, remarkable achievements and dedicated service.
- **Ian Gordon** was awarded a Service Award in recognition of sustained and significant service.
- **Mindi Nath** achieved 50 years of consecutive membership with the SSA. We are very grateful for your support over the many years Mindi, thank you!

We also wish to highlight the following members' successes:

- **Aurore Delaigle** was elected a Fellow of the Australia Academy of Science.
- **Daniel Fryer** was awarded the Vice Chancellor's Sessional Teaching Award at La Trobe University.
- **Parinaz Mehdipour** won first prize at the Virtual Poster Pitch hosted in June by the SSA Young Statisticians Network.
- **Ben Harrap** who won the SSA T-shirt Competition with his design recognising some of Australia's greatest statisticians.

Many of our academic members have also enjoyed successes with their grant applications. We highlight the following:

- **Jessica Kasza** and **Andrew Forbes** for their ARC Discovery Project: *Increasing the efficiency and interpretability of stepped wedge trials.*
- **David Balding** for his successful ARC Discovery Project: *Demographic and evolutionary inferences from large, whole-genome datasets.*
- **Peter Taylor, Howard Bondell** and **Rob Hyndman**, whose ARC Industrial Transformation Training Centre grant for the Training Centre in Optimisation Technologies, Integrated Methodologies, and Applications (OPTIMA) was funded.
- **Stephen Leslie** for his successful NHRMC Ideas Grant: *Immune-associated genetic variation and autoimmune disease.*
- **Davis McCarthy** for his successful NHMRC Investigator Grant: *Developing interpretable machine learning models for clinical imaging and single-cell genomics.*

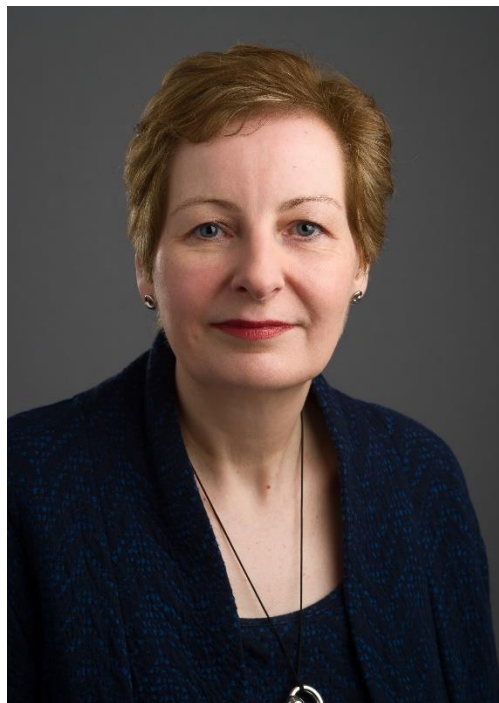
## Featured events

### Belz Lecture 2020

On World Statistics Day, Teresa Dickinson delivered the 52nd Belz Lecture nationwide. More than 150 virtual guests were treated with a thoughtful discussion on the critical role of trust in connecting statistics with the world we all hope to understand and contribute to.

Teresa discussed how important it is to maintain trust both in the numbers themselves but also in the institutions that make them available. Providing insights into the importance of trust at all levels of production and dissemination of statistics, Teresa described how the ABS strives to achieve and continue to achieve high levels of trust. In a time of such uncertainty, it was uplifting to hear of the emphasis put on authenticity and honesty, but also the passion for providing reliable statistics our country can depend on.

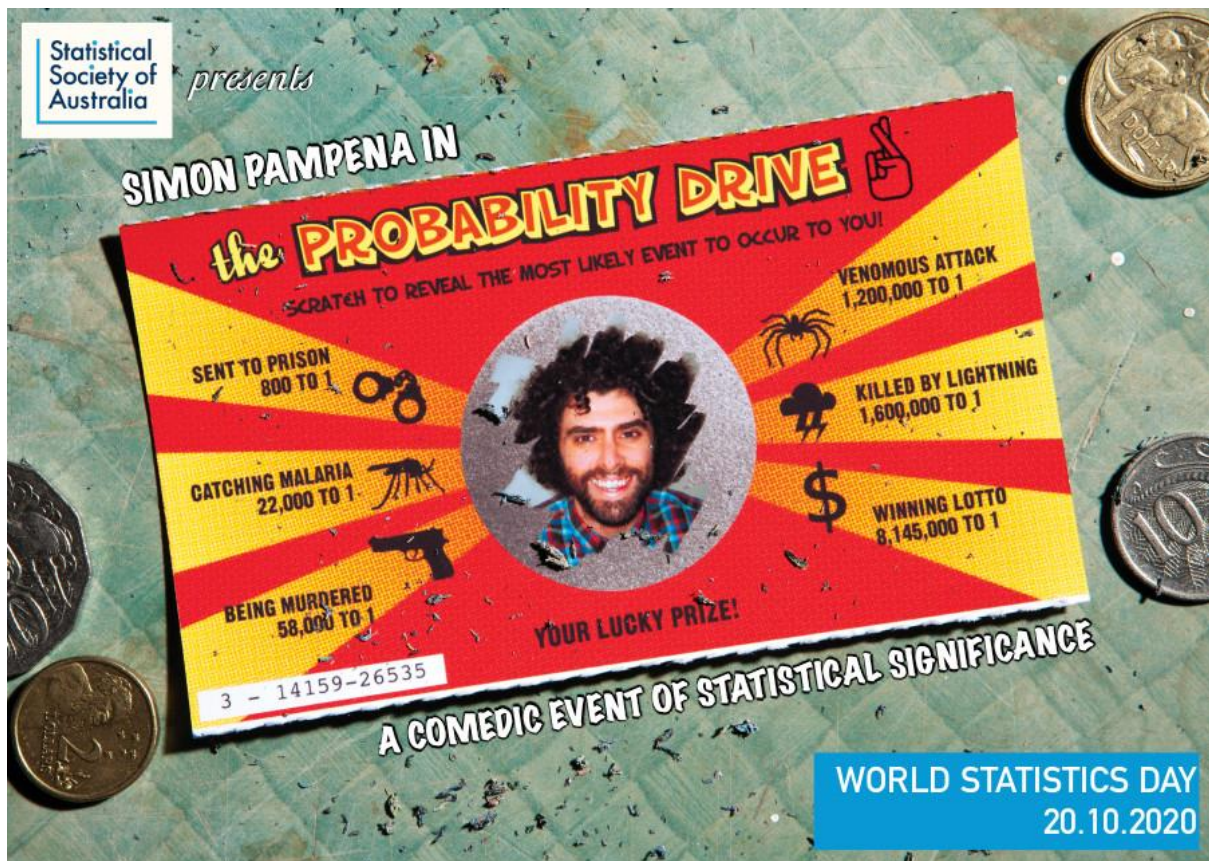
On behalf of the SSA, we thank Teresa for a fantastic event and welcome her to the 'Honour Board' of Belz Lecturers.



## The Probability Drive

On 20 Oct, following the World Statistics Day Belz Lecture, our members traded the usual Belz Dinner for statistically significant hilarity, delivered by 'standup mathematician', Simon Pampena. In a show that transcended virtual meeting technology, Simon roused our patriotic and statistical pride by reminding us of the strategy behind Steven Bradbury's Olympic performances, and told us heart-warming stories of how Pythagoras's theorem can lead to happiness among shapes. Thank you, Simon!

The finale to World Statistics Day was a social event at the 'virtual pub'. Attendees were able to mingle, debrief on the events of World Statistics Day, and drumroll the random selection of the door prize winners.



## COVID-19: modelling and public health policy

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a lot of interest from the statistics / data science community. On 28 April, we invited two Melbourne-based statisticians/epidemiologists who advise the government on the coronavirus pandemic to share their work with us.

The first half was presented by Prof. Allen Cheng, who is both an AStat as well as an infectious diseases physician. Allen first described several models that have been used to inform the policy makers around importation risk, transmission risk, and potential load on the health care system – this underpinned the discussion around ‘flattening the curve’. Allen also discussed some ‘unhelpful models’ that are being used elsewhere.

The second half was presented by Dr Freya Shearer, an epidemiological modeller at PRISM. Freya and her colleagues were instrumental at developing the framework that quantified the importation risk from various countries. This framework helped uncover countries that have a high likelihood of under-reporting their cases, and by extension the risk they posed to Australia. This ultimately helped the policy makers decide on international travel bans during the early stage of the pandemic.

Overall, the event was extremely well attended. We had 223 attendees (9 from overseas), which is a record for a non-named lecture.



Allen Cheng



Freya Shearer

## Event calendar

31 March

### **Measuring well-being (+ AGM)**

[Dennis Trewin](#)

Attendance: 61

28 April

### **COVID-19: modelling and public health policy**

[Allen Cheng](#), [Freya Shearer](#)

Attendance: 223

19 May

### **SSA Vic trivia night**

Attendance: 22

26 May

### **Raising heretics: Teaching effective scepticism using data science**

[Linda McIver](#)

Attendance: 43

23 June

### **SSA Vic mentoring night**

[Helen Bartley](#), [Michael Dalton](#), [Alison Harcourt](#), [Roger Hilton](#), [Jessica Kasza](#), [Karen Lamb](#), [Dina Neiger](#), [Cameron Patrick](#), [Dennis Trewin](#), [Matthew Spittal](#), [Antony Ugoni](#)

Attendance: 25

20/21 July

### **Machine learning with Python (workshops)**

[Colleagues from Eliiza](#)

Attendance: 18

21 July

### **'The Eye of the Beholder': Regression coefficients & mechanical objectivity in public health research**

[Taya Collyer](#)

Attendance: 47

24/27 July

### **Introduction to Julia (workshops)**

[Yoni Nazarathy](#)

Attendance: 22



28/29 July

**Data visualisation with R (workshops)**

Di Cook, Emi Tanaka

Attendance: 32

25 August

**Statistical consulting in the 21st century**

Elyse Corless, Graham Hepworth, Hwan-Jin Yoon, Doug Zhan

Attendance: 130

22 September

**Early career industry showcase**

Nick De Silva, Michelle Lugton, Ben Phillips, Sarah Romanes, Rose Skandari,  
Peter Taylor

Attendance: 183

20 October

**'To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be love': a maxim for official statistics? (Belz Lecture / World Statistics Day)**

Teresa Dickinson

Attendance: 158 (lecture), 50 (comedy show)

11/12 November

**Data visualisation with R (workshops)**

Di Cook, Emi Tanaka

Attendance: 40

17 November

**Should statisticians work from home after the lockdown? (+ SGM)**

Emily Karahalios, Karen Lamb, Thomas Lumley, Andrew Robinson

Attendance: 50

## Financial summary

### Revenues

|                                    |                    |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Membership fees (branch component) | \$6,090.00         |
| Workshops                          | \$15,790.98        |
| Events                             | \$35.18            |
| Interest on savings                | \$119.38           |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>\$22,034.88</b> |

### Expenses

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Financial support for conferences & workshops | \$1,485.00         |
| Workshop expenses                             | \$9,649.60         |
| Belz Lecture & social event                   | \$2,013.20         |
| Other event expenses                          | \$450.00           |
| Other expenses                                | \$242.15           |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | <b>\$13,839.95</b> |

**Surplus** **\$8,194.93**

### Balance sheet (at 31 Dec 2020)

#### Assets

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Term deposit                                    | \$20,000.00        |
| Savings account                                 | \$11,845.96        |
| SSA Vic funds held with the national SSA office | \$1,652.00         |
| <b>Total</b>                                    | <b>\$33,497.96</b> |

#### Liabilities

|                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Accounts payable | \$600.00        |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>\$600.00</b> |

**Net assets** **\$32,897.96**

*This financial summary is reported on an accrual basis for the year 2020*

**Statistical Society of Australia  
Victorian Branch Incorporated**

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Includes written contributions from:  
Kohleth Chia, Ben Harrap, Lizzie Korevaar,  
Rheanna Mainzer, Hien Nguyen, Damjan Vukcevic

[www.statsoc.org.au/victoria](http://www.statsoc.org.au/victoria)

