

Leading Edge Research at Murdoch University

Synergy

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE WITH ASIA

Wooing Asia's 'new rich'

Protecting intellectual property....and fishing stocks

Also:

Speaking the language - a key to success

A winning formula for research success

ASSOCIATE Professor John Webb said he felt both surprised and humble when awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 1996.

Professor Webb's award was made in recognition of his work in establishing an international network of chemists who co-operate in helping each other to develop and sustain research programmes.

This co-operation involved provision of equipment, exchanges of technicians, and young researchers, assistance with technical information and spare parts for scientific instrumentation, and the hosting of regional seminars and conferences.

More recently, in April - in Hiroshima, Japan - Professor Webb was also awarded a special citation by the Federation of Asian Chemical Societies for this leadership role in his profession throughout Asia.

"On the one hand the award of the Order of Australia was quite a surprise, but on the other it was nice recognition that this kind of scientific collaboration in Asia is respectable," he said.

"Fifteen years ago, when I first started to get involved in this collaboration, it was all seen as being a little bit crazy, misdirected and misguided, because Asia at that time was a place you flew across to get to some place where something more interesting was happening in terms of scientific research."

This regional collaboration includes research into thalassaemia - the iron overload disease affecting millions of persons around the world, particularly in South-East Asia.

Professor Webb, who has spent considerable time in recent years encouraging research institutions

throughout South-East Asia to co-operate in their quest to overcome thalassaemia, attributed much of his success to colleagues and research students who have worked with him on the problem for much of the last two decades.

In that time they have built up a world-class inter-disciplinary research team at Murdoch University, involving researchers from such fields as chemistry, physics, medicine and biology. He acknowledges the role of fellow academics David Macey and Tim St Pierre, and the many postgraduate students from South-East Asian nations, who have worked with the team at Murdoch.

Professor Webb and his team are now internationally recognised for their research into iron-overload problems, and their role in creating research links between institutions in the region.

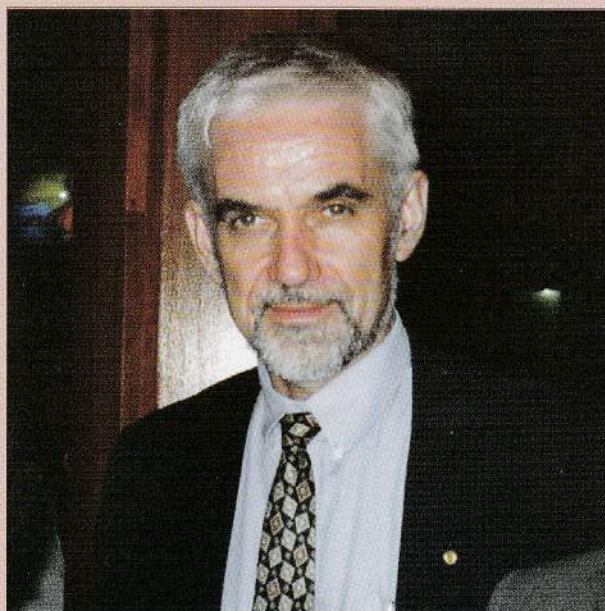
Professor Webb was recently elected as the first foreign member of the Chemical Society of Vietnam in acknowledgment of his role in trying to assist the professional chemists of that country to become part of the regional research network.

Professor Webb said his current research was focussed on trying to understand the nature of the iron that is being deposited into the tissues of people suffering from thalassaemia, and how it is damaging those tissues.

"We have recently discovered there are different kinds of iron oxides being deposited in different tissues of these patients.

"But now we want to develop a way of measuring the iron levels in those tissues externally - using magnetic resonance imaging. This will enable us to measure the amount of iron that is being extracted from the liver during treatment, without having to conduct invasive testing through a biopsy, which is the current practice."

Professor Webb said the team also was engaged in a project in which some of the concepts which have emerged through their study of biological systems, could be applied to developing new materials in the field of nanotechnology. ■



Associate Professor John Webb

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