

# Bridging Minds: Australia-France Research Forum

Meeting

AUFRANDE Annual Event

Date

3-4 June 2025

## Speakers

### H.E. Pierre-André Imbert

Ambassador of France to Australia



Born on March 25, 1970, Mr. Pierre-André Imbert has worked with the President of the Republic since May 2017, initially as Social Advisor. In 2020, he was appointed as Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, in charge of the public policy division.

From 2012 to 2017, he was successively Advisor and then Chief of Staff to several ministers of Labor and Employment. General Inspector of Finance, an economist by training (Master in economics and MBA from ESCP Europe), he worked in the private sector from 2003 to 2012, first with the consulting firm Altedia, where he was heading the social engineering, restructuring and economic development department, then by becoming a founding partner of the consulting firm Alixio. He initially began his professional career in research and education at the University of Paris Sorbonne, before being appointed from 1997 until 2002 as Counselor of the President of the Finance Commission of the National Assembly.

### Ms. Fiona Letos

Executive Director Trade, Global Engagement and International Education, Global Victoria



Ms. Fiona Letos is the Executive Director, Trade, Global Engagement and International Education in Global Victoria, the Victorian Government's trade facilitation and promotion agency. Ms. Letos is responsible for driving global engagement strategy and partnerships, administering the Victorian Government Trade and Investment international network of 23 offices, supporting industry and clients to grow the state's exports and position Victoria as a globally connected state, and promoting Melbourne, Victoria as a world class study destination.

Ms. Letos was previously the Director, Study Melbourne and International Education from 2020 to 2023, where she led sector policy and strategy, the Global Education Network in key international markets, student welfare and empowerment programs and the Study Melbourne brand. In her previous roles in state government, Ms. Letos managed global operations and delivered international policy, programs, and strategic initiatives to drive Victoria's global engagement efforts.

Ms. Letos also worked with the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs delivering major international commemorative events and education programs. Ms. Letos holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons), University of Melbourne, and a Graduate Diploma (Media and Communications), La Trobe University.

## Prof. Catherine Itsiopoulos

Interim Deputy Vice Chancellor of the STEM College & Vice-President, RMIT University



Prof. Catherine Itsiopoulos was appointed as Interim Deputy Vice Chancellor (STEM College) in 2024. She is responsible for academic leadership of the STEM college comprising 5 schools and the Head of the Bundoora Health Precinct. Prof. Itsiopoulos was previously the Executive Dean of Health and Biomedical Sciences at RMIT, where she championed the growth of health disciplines, research grant success, and strategic health partnerships. Her previous academic leadership roles include Pro Vice Chancellor of the College of Science, Health, Engineering and Education at Murdoch University. She has held senior academic and research leadership roles at La Trobe, University of Canberra, Deakin University, RMIT, and the University of Melbourne.

As a senior academic leader Prof. Itsiopoulos' mission is to build a high performing student-centred culture within academic and professional teams and foster engaging learning environments co-designed with strategic industry partners that prepare students for successful careers and support academic and professional staff in theirs.

## Dr. Nathalie Simenel-Amar

Science and Technology Officer, Embassy of France in Canberra



After completing an engineering formation and a PhD in experimental Nuclear Physics, Dr. Nathalie Simenel-Amar devoted her professional career to spreading scientific culture across borders. She currently works at the Embassy of France in Australia where her role is to engage with scientific and academic communities, decision-makers, industry representatives, engineers, teachers, and society stakeholders to promote structured bilateral cooperation.

Dr. Simenel-Amar organises conferences and debates on a wide range of topics, produces science reports for different mediums in both French and English, to create successful partnerships between France and Australia.

## Dist. Prof. Arnan Mitchell

Distinguished Professor, RMIT University



Dist. Prof. Arnan Mitchell is a highly multidisciplinary researcher working in micro-chip technologies combining light, sound, fluids and electronics with applications spanning radar systems for defence, high speed fibre optic communications and point of care diagnostic systems for biomedicine.

He is the Director of the RMIT Micro Nano Research Facility, Director of the Integrated Photonics and Applications Centre and Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Optical Microcombs for Breakthrough Science. Dist. Prof. Mitchell is enthusiastic about translating technology into the hands of end-users and has dedicated much of his career to building and training diverse teams and comprehensive micro and nanotechnology infrastructure to enable breakthrough discoveries to achieve real world impact.

## Panellists & Moderators

### Prof. Kondo-François Aguey-Zinsou

President and CTO, H2potential & Co-Director, FACES



Prof. Kondo-François Aguey-Zinsou, an expert in hydrogen technologies with 20 years of experience, leads the MERLin group at the University of Sydney's School of Chemistry. He was Director of the Australian Association for Hydrogen Energy and Vice-President of the Australian French Association for Research and Innovation. He also co-directs the ARC Training Centre for Hydrogen GlobH2E, is President and CTO of H2potential, and he serves as Associate Editor of ACS Applied Energy Materials.

Prof. Aguey-Zinsou's research focuses on hydrogen storage, fuel cells, and advanced catalysts, supporting applications in fuel cells, batteries, and synthetic fuels. He has been recognised with awards like Australia's Most Innovative Engineers (2018) for his contributions to the field.

### Dr. Daniel Barr

Principal Advisor, Research Integrity, RMIT University



Dr. Daniel Barr is an international authority in research integrity who specialises in how institutions enable and ensure responsible research. At RMIT, his work focuses on researcher capability development and support services, the governance and administration of research, and the management of research integrity breaches.

Dr. Barr is a co-author of the APEC Guiding Principles for Research Integrity, a Training Fellow of the Australasian Research Management Society, and an inaugural recipient of the Paul Taylor Medal for Excellence in Research Integrity. Dr. Barr also serves on the Governing Board of the World Conferences on Research Integrity Foundation and has led global discussions at conferences in Hong Kong (2019), Cape Town (2022), and Athens (2024) on research integrity policy and assessment, the responsible conduct of research during the COVID-19 pandemic, improving trust in research translation, and the impact of generative AI.

### Dr. Aaron Belbasis

Applied Research Leader, Aurecon



Dr. Aaron Belbasis, a distinguished global innovation leader at Aurecon, brings a wealth of expertise in technology innovation and strategic R&D in industry. With a rich background supporting various industries at different stages of the value chain, Dr. Belbasis has firmly established himself as a trusted authority in the realm of emergent technologies and the strategies required to harness their potential. As the head of Applied Research at Aurecon, he plays a pivotal role in spearheading collaborative initiatives which shape how Aurecon partners and drives impact throughout the innovation ecosystem. Together with his team, he navigates the diverse technical disciplines, markets, and regions where Aurecon operates, shaping innovation that offers clarity and guidance in the ever-evolving landscape of emergent technologies and their respective solutions.

Dr. Belbasis' cross-disciplinary career is an ongoing journey that spans pioneering blue-sky research in university labs, incubating tech solutions within startups, and driving scaled innovation through targeted research translation in various industries across the globe.

## Dr. Kimberley Coulson

Strategy and Operations Manager, AFRAN



Since September 2024, Dr. Kimberley Coulson is posted at ANU School of Cybernetics as a Seconded for the Australian-French Association for Research and Innovation (AFRAN Inc.). Her role within the association as the Strategy and Operations Manager is to create avenues for collaboration between the French and the Australian research ecosystems. The School of Cybernetics offers her the ideal environment to immerse herself in a transdisciplinary ecosystem, to meet and exchange with a unique community of researchers, artists and motivated individuals from whom she can draw inspiration for the future development of AFRAN.

Her dedication to scientific cooperation comes from her previous role as a Science Officer at the Embassy of France to Australia where she has developed several skills around communication, event organisation, project management. Before settling in Canberra, a city she had fallen deeply in love with by the way, Dr. Coulson was a researcher in immuno-oncology at RESTORE lab in Toulouse, Southern France, where she has completed a PhD. Her research interests were focused on ovarian and colorectal cancer, peritoneal metastasis, nuclear receptor and tissue-resident vs infiltrated macrophages.

## Ms. Jessica Davis

Dual and Joint Degree Coordinator, the University of Sydney



Ms. Jessica Davis is Dual Degree and Joint PhD Coordinator at the University of Sydney where she previously served as the Study Abroad Manager, fostering global educational partnerships.

Ms. Davis' experience extends beyond academia, having contributed to prestigious organisations such as UNESCO, TAFE Directors Australia, and the Australian Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education.

## Dr. Jean-Philippe Diguët

Director, IRL Crossing



Dr. Jean-Philippe Diguët is a senior researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) specialising in the optimisation of embedded systems and advanced System on Chip technologies. He earned his PhD from the University of Rennes I in 1996, focusing on signal and image processing. His research interests include hardware/software co-optimisation, self-adaptive systems, and autonomous systems, among others.

Currently, he is the Director of CNRS IRL CROSSING and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Adelaide. Dr. Diguët has been invited as a professor at Tohoku University, Japan, and USP University, Brazil, he has been a visitor researcher at The University of Queensland in Australia and IMEC in Belgium and has held key leadership roles at CNRS Lab-STICC in France. His career includes supervising multiple research projects with various types grants and about 30 PhD students.



## Ms. Mélanie Ducros

Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Officer, Expertise France



Ms. Mélanie Ducros is currently working on the topic of renewable energy and hydrogen with both the Victorian Hydrogen Hub (VH2) and FACET. She has extensive experience managing complex international projects in multicultural environments. She has led initiatives integrating innovative technologies into climate change adaptation strategies. Among others she had led industry-driven research on the environmental impacts of tidal turbines and brackish water desalination, particularly in developing countries.

Ms. Ducros' work spans renewable energy, environmental impact, water-energy-food nexus, solar desalination, and hydrogen applications, fostering collaboration between research, industry, and governments. Originally from New Caledonia, she is deeply committed to addressing climate change in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Dr. Mona El-Ayoubi

Senior Educational Development Consultant



Dr. Mona El-Ayoubi is a highly experienced higher education leader with extensive national and international expertise in learning and teaching. She specialises in the design, development, and implementation of innovative curricula. Dr. El-Ayoubi has played a pivotal role in providing strategic learning and teaching advice across disciplinary teams to improve pedagogy and student engagement. With extensive experience in the review and reengineering of higher education programs, she leverages transformative strategies, diverse pedagogies, and quality frameworks to enhance learning experiences.

Her current research focuses on the integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence tools (AI) in assessment and curricula, driving innovation and transforming educational practices. Passionate about the future of education, she explores how AI can enhance personalised learning to foster graduate capabilities including AI literacy, problem-solving, and data-driven decision-making. By leveraging AI to create dynamic and adaptive learning environments, she equips educators and learners with the skills needed to navigate the AI environment.

## Prof. Karen Hapgood

Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Swinburne University of Technology



Prof. Karen Hapgood is an experienced executive leader, with an engineering and STEM background as well as 15 years of leadership experience in the higher education sector. Prior to joining Swinburne, she was the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science Engineering and Built Environment at Deakin University.

Prof. Hapgood is a renowned researcher in the fields of chemical engineering and pharmaceutical manufacturing, a Fellow of ATSE and passionate about diversity and inclusion, especially for women in STEM in Australia.

## Prof. Frédéric Hollande

Director, IRL PHANTOM & Vice-President, AFRAN



Prof. Frédéric Hollande heads the Department of Clinical Pathology at the University of Melbourne and is deputy Head of the Melbourne Medical School. Prof. Hollande joined the University of Melbourne in 2012. Prior to this, he worked at the Functional Genomics Institute in Montpellier (France), making substantial contributions to the characterisation of mechanisms underpinning cancer progression and treatment response. In 2007 he co-founded a start-up company to enable the clinical translation of his research, working as joint-CSO until its acquisition by a pharma company in 2011. Prof. Hollande's research group combines functional and molecular analyses to advance knowledge and foster the development of precision oncology strategies in colorectal and pancreatic cancers.

Prof. Hollande has played an active role in developing a strong partnership between the University of Melbourne and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), including as Academic Lead for their International joint-PhD program, and as director of the PHANTOM lab, a CNRS international research laboratory in collaboration with the Cancer Research Centre of Lyon. He has been vice-president of the Australian-French Association for Research and Innovation (AFRAN) since early 2024.

## Prof. Usha Iyer-Raniga

Professor of Sustainable Built Environment, the School of Property, Construction and Project Management, RMIT University



Prof. Usha Iyer-Raniga is co-lead of the Circular Built Environment (CBE) working group established under the GlobalABC/One Planet Network's Materials Hub hosted by UNEP and jointly implemented by UNEP, UNOPS and UN Habitat. The circularity research and engagement under the One Planet Network and GlobalABC responds to SDGs 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, and 17.

Prof. Iyer-Raniga has been invited as keynote speaker and invited speaker at national and international conferences including COPs 26 - 28, seminars and workshops. She recently launched her book, *Circular practices in buildings and construction to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, at COP 29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Prof. Iyer-Raniga's recent keynotes include *Buildings and Global Climate Forum's Circular economy in the built environment: a solution to the triple planetary crises* and on *Multilateral cooperations towards circular economy in the Asia-Pacific* as part of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Philippines public conference to raise awareness on sustainability initiatives and education. Her teaching portfolio extends to Asian countries, she has published over 200 publications and has received state, national, and international funding worth over USD \$35 million.

## Mr. Manish Kumar

AUFRANDE Doctoral Candidate, ENSAM & UNSW



Mr. Manish Kumar is pursuing a cotutelle PhD at Arts et Métiers ParisTech (ENSAM) and at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) within the AUFRANDE Program.

His project, titled *Effect of the density gradient on the mechanical behaviour of an architectural material under dynamic loadings*, is supervised by Prof. Philippe Viot and Prof. Paul Hazell.

## Prof. Olaf Maennel

Chair for Cybersecurity, Defence Science and Technology Group, University of Adelaide



Prof. Olaf Maennel holds the Defence Science and Technology Group - University of Adelaide Joint Chair in Cybersecurity. He has been with the University of Adelaide since 2023, and previously held faculty positions at Loughborough University in England and Tallinn University of Technology in Estonia, where he led the research at the Centre for Digital Forensics and Cybersecurity and established a Centre for Maritime Cybersecurity.

Prof. Maennel's research interests started with computer network security and have broadened over the years to include cyber defence technical exercises and critical infrastructure protection, focusing on transport sector cybersecurity. He has chaired numerous conferences, including ACM SIGCOMM and the ACM Internet Measurement Conference. He has been active in the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) standardisation body, contributed to the European Commission as a vice-chair in several funding calls, and chaired a working group at the European Cyber Security Organisation. He has closely collaborated with the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (NATO CCDCOE). At the University of Adelaide, he contributes to Australia's cyber resilience through research and education.

## Prof. Aonghus McNabola

Deputy Dean International of the School of Engineering, RMIT University



Prof. Aonghus McNabola is the Deputy Dean International at the School of Engineering providing strategic leadership to strengthen the quality and impact of the School's international research and teaching activities. He is also a Professor of Energy & Environmental Engineering, and conducts applied fluid dynamics research within these fields.

Prof. McNabola is a Civil and Environmental Engineer by training and obtained a PhD from Trinity College Dublin in environmental fluid dynamics measurement and modelling in the field of air pollution in 2008. Prior to joining RMIT he worked as an academic in the School of Engineering at Trinity College Dublin for over 16 years. He was the Director for Global Engagement in the School of Engineering, and prior to this served as the Head of the Civil, Structural and Environmental Engineering Department.

## Ms. Leonie Paul

REDI Doctoral Candidate, LUT University & RMIT University



Ms. Leonie Paul is a PhD candidate in management and business studies with a specific research interest in sustainable development and the necessary cognitive shifts required to implement sustainability in organisational settings and beyond.

Ms. Paul is pursuing her doctoral degree in cotutelle between LUT University in Finland and RMIT University in Australia under the REDI Program. An important element of her research is the inclusion of diverse voices and critical reflections on research methods and practices, particularly from an equality and justice perspective.

## Dr. Sergey Pikuz

Chief Technology Officer, HB11 Energy



Dr. Sergey Pikuz leads the technology team at HB11 Energy, developing laser fusion energy solutions. His research background is in experimental high energy density physics (HEDP) with high-power optical lasers and X-ray free electron lasers.

Dr. Pikuz' key expertise includes high-power laser interaction with matter, laser physics and engineering, laser target design, X-ray plasma diagnostics methods and instrumentation, development of high-power-laser facilities and research infrastructure.

## Prof. Jenny Pringle

Director, ARC Industrial Transformation Training Centre for Future Energy Storage Technologies, Deakin University



Prof. Jenny Pringle works in the Institute for Frontier Materials at Deakin University. Her research interests centre around the development of new ionic materials for a range of different clean energy applications. She is Director of the ARC Industrial Transformation Training Centre 'StorEnergy'.

Prof. Pringle received her degree and PhD at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, working on ionic liquids, before moving to Monash University in 2002. From 2008-2012 she held an ARC QEII Fellowship, and she moved to Deakin University in 2013. There she leads research into the development and use of ionic liquids and plastic crystals for applications including sustainable cooling, thermal energy storage, CO2 separation membranes, sodium and lithium batteries. She coordinates the Electrochemical Storage activities within IRN-FACES.



## Mr. Nishant Shandilya

Country Representative for Australia & New Zealand, EURAXESS Worldwide



Mr. Nishant Shandilya is the Country Representative for Australia & New Zealand at EURAXESS Worldwide, an initiative of the European Commission (EC) that addresses barriers to the mobility of researchers and enhances scientific collaboration between Europe and the rest of the world. He is also the Regional Manager for the Pacific for Centralised Support to the Network of Erasmus+ National Focal Points (Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe).

Mr. Shandilya has led and written numerous high-impact EC-funded grants and tenders, particularly under FP7, Horizon 2020, and Horizon Europe, focusing on ICT, internationalisation, and social innovation. In addition to lead-writing evaluation studies and impact assessment reports for multiple EC Directorates-General, he has played a key role in establishing Centres of Excellence across the globe and has also organised and managed international workshops and exhibitions. Passionate about fostering global research networks, Mr. Shandilya continues to create strategic partnerships that drive scientific collaboration and innovation between Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Island Countries and Europe.

## Prof. Joy Sumner

Co-Director of FACET, Swinburne University of Technology



Prof. Joy Sumner holds both a Master's and Bachelor's degree from the University of Cambridge, with a focus on materials science. She developed her expertise during a PhD at Cambridge, where she specialised in scanning probe microscopy techniques for characterising semiconductors. She has spent 14 years at Cranfield University including as Head of the Centre for Energy Engineering since 2022, in close collaboration with industrial partners.

Prof. Sumner's research focuses on understanding the degradation mechanisms of materials in energy systems, with particular emphasis on the performance of steel and nickel-based alloys in the extreme environments generated within energy systems. Her work significantly advances the understanding and development of materials critical to the energy transition, ensuring that energy systems are both efficient and sustainable. In addition to her research, Prof. Sumner has a strong commitment to STEM outreach and education.

## Prof. Justin Zobel

Pro Vice-Chancellor, Graduate & International Research, the University of Melbourne



Prof. Justin Zobel is a Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor in the School of Computing and Information Systems at the University of Melbourne and is the Pro Vice-Chancellor responsible for overseeing the university's research degrees such as PhDs. As a researcher, he is best known for development of algorithms underpinning web search. In 2025, in recognition of this research, he was made a Fellow of the ACM. He is also known for his contributions to measurement techniques, data structures and algorithms, bioinformatics, and research training.

Prof. Zobel received his PhD from Melbourne in 1991 and, prior to returning to Melbourne in 2008, worked as a researcher and academic at RMIT University and Australia's national IT institute NICTA (now named "data61"). He has published over 240 papers and has been supervisor of around 45 PhD candidates. He is the author of three highly regarded textbooks on graduate study and research practice.

## Facilitators



**Prof. Thierry Corrège**  
CNRS



**Assoc. Prof. Yvonne Durandet**  
Swinburne University of Technology



**Ms. Celia Wong**  
Swinburne University of Technology



**Prof. Aonghus McNabola**  
RMIT University



**Prof. Olaf Maennel**  
The University of Adelaide



**Taha Lamine**  
AUFRANDE - ENIB &  
University of South Australia



**Assoc. Prof. Rey Chin**  
The University of Adelaide



**Dr. Kimberley Coulson**  
AFRAN



**Ms. Héloïse Bernard**  
CNRS

## AURFANDE Doctoral Candidates



**Sebastian Alveteg**

CentraleSupélec &  
Macquarie University



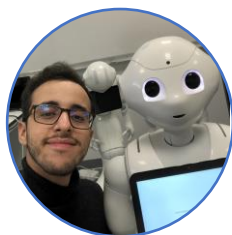
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**Manish Kumar**

ENSAM & the  
University of New South Wales



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**Hamza Nisar**

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**Krupamaya Panda**

Ecole Centrale de Lyon &  
the University of Sydney



**Felix Pollak**

Université Grenoble Alpes &  
the University of Tasmania



**Ananthakrishnan**

**Ravindran**  
IMT Atlantique &  
the University of Melbourne



**Shahaz Shahul Hameed**

Ecole Centrale de Lyon &  
Swinburne University of Technology



**Marta Stentella**

Université Grenoble Alpes &  
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**Ardianto Wibowo**

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**Sebin Sebastian Xavier**

Université Grenoble Alpes &  
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