

Final report: SMBE Australasian Protein Structural Phylogenetics Meeting 2026

1. Overview

The SMBE Australasian Protein Structural Phylogenetics Meeting 2026 (APSPM 2026) was held at the University of Queensland St Lucia Campus in Brisbane, Australia on 15–18 February 2026. The meeting brought together researchers working at the interface of protein evolution, structural biology, computational method development, and phylogenetics.

We conceived this event to be a focused regional meeting with international participation, and a collegial platform for early-career researchers (ECRs), students, and established investigators to exchange ideas and build a community around the rapidly growing field of structural phylogenetics.

To maximise accessibility and participation across Australasia and internationally, in-person and online attendance was offered. Registration was free to all attendees, thanks to the generous support of the SMBE Regional Meeting grant, which also sponsored the travel costs for several ECRs and invited speakers.

We successfully completed APSPM 2026, within budget, with strong scientific engagement and positive participant feedback. The SMBE Code of Conduct was followed at all times.

The meeting's official website will remain online for at least 24 months at <https://biosig.lab.uq.edu.au/strphy26/strphy26/>



Group photo taken during the meeting on the University of Queensland, St Lucia Campus, Brisbane, Australia.

2. Scientific Scope and Program

The primary objective of APSPM 2026 was to provide a first of its kind, dedicated forum for discussing structural approaches to evolutionary inference, with emphasis on emerging computational methodologies and biological applications. Abstract submission and speaker selection were coordinated by the organising committee. Selection criteria prioritised scientific quality and relevance, topical and geographical diversity, gender balance, and representation across career stages. The program was structured to allow extended discussion periods and networking opportunities, fostering in-depth scientific exchange.

In total, the meeting saw 55 in-person attendees and an additional 22 registered for remote participation.

The [scientific program](#) consisted of:

- Two plenary lectures by internationally recognised leaders in the field
- Eleven invited presentations from established and emerging researchers
- Twenty-four contributed talks selected from submitted abstracts
- Three hands on workshops: Structural Homology Detection, Phylogenetic Inference from Structure, and Protein Language Models and Phylogenetics
- Discussion session to address the current state and future directions of the structural phylogenetics community

Main research themes included:

- Structural characters in phylogenetic systematics
- Large-scale structure comparison and annotation
- Protein domain evolution and ancient protein history
- Multimeric assemblies and protein–protein interfaces
- AI-based protein structure prediction in evolutionary analysis
- Applications to viruses, parasites, early-diverging eukaryotes, and the origins of life

3. Participation and Demographics

APSPM 2026 attracted in-person participants from 11 countries: Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, USA, Mexico, Uruguay, Switzerland, Belgium, Norway, and Germany. Online participants were based in Australia, Finland, India, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, and USA.

Career stages

Faculty and senior researchers: 21

Postdoctoral researchers: 26

Doctoral and master's students: 25

Undergraduate students: 5

Gender representation

She/her: 20

He/him: 41

They/them: 1

Prefer not to say: 15

We put great effort into balancing gender among invited speakers and session chairs. However, the final lineup of speakers did not achieve the level of balance we had hoped for. We understand that improving representation in the field is important and we will continue to work towards this goal as the structural phylogenetics continues to grow.

4. Outcomes and Impact

- Consolidation and strengthening of the Australasian and international communities working in protein structural phylogenetics.
- Showcasing of methodological advances in structure-based evolutionary inference.
- Presentation and networking opportunities for early-career researchers and students.
- Increased visibility of structural phylogenetics within the broader molecular evolution community.
- Created a space for new collaborations across research fields, institutions and countries.
- Reinforced the value of specialised regional meetings within the SMBE framework.
- Awarded travel grants to five students and ECRs, with an accompanying certificate.
- Awarded Best Student Presentation non-monetary prizes and an accompanying certificate to three students.
- Received very positive participant feedback and strong interest in future meetings on structural phylogenetics.

5. Financial overview

All finances were overseen by the Australian National University (the host institution of Jordan Douglas from our organising committee). All expenses were paid in AUD, and the approximate value is shown in USD for indicative purposes only. Note that the exchange rate was volatile over this timeframe in favour of the Australian dollar.

REVENUE - Exchange rate of 0.6515 (16 Dec 2025) used during transfer

Initial funds received from SMBE (90%): AUD 44,205.68 USD 28,800

OUTSTANDING REVENUE - Assuming an exchange rate of 0.71 (11 Mar 2026)

Final funds from SMBE (10%): ~AUD 4,526.45 USD 3,200

EXPENSES* - Exchange rate of 0.71 (11 Mar 2026) for indicative purposes only

Catering costs: AUD 20,017.37 USD ~14,162

Travel support for speakers: AUD 26,874 USD ~19,022

Equipment hire: AUD 312 USD ~220

Total expenses: AUD 47,203.37 USD ~33,400

NET SURPLUS - Exchange rate of 0.71 (11 Mar 2026) for indicative purposes only

Revenue minus expenses AUD ~1,528.74 USD ~1,080.67

*These figures are not final as some outstanding payments are still being processed. An itemised financial report will follow.

6. Concluding Remarks

APSPM 2026 brought together researchers from different fields (i.e. structural biology, evolutionary biology and bioinformatics) with the common interest of studying protein function and evolution and the drive to build a community around it. The successful delivery of this meeting, organised by early-career researchers and supported by SMBE, demonstrates the active contribution of the Oceania region to the society and the advancement of emerging fields such as structural phylogenetics. The organising committee thanks SMBE for its support and looks forward to continued engagement in future regional and international initiatives.