

ICS SEMINAR SERIES 2024

Public views of Synthetic Biology in Australia

5 September 2024 | 11:30am - 1:00pm

Room: EA.2.13 Parramatta South Campus

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Institute for Culture
and Society

Abstract

This seminar discusses public and stakeholder engagement on the potential role of an emerging scientific field in climate change mitigation, focusing on Australian perspectives on novel greenhouse gas reduction (GHGs) technologies. Synthetic biology (SynBio) is considered transformative in addressing societal and environmental challenges. However, it is a young interdisciplinary science that carries far reaching implications, not only in terms of reshaping industries but risks including environmental harm and public alienation from its development and widespread deployment. Responsible innovation requires moving beyond communicating promises, or measuring acceptance and knowledge levels, to meaningful societal dialogue. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand how cultural narratives might shape the way people conceptualize SynBio, climate change and a range of proposed interventions. Thus, this research will contribute to improved science communication through a richer understanding of public and stakeholder perspectives, helping forward dialogue at the science-policy-society interface of a pressing issue.

Biography

Henry Dixon is a multidisciplinary social and behavioural scientist, whose current work includes topics from cognitive and cross-cultural research. Across his research, a main theme is how and what people think. He completed my PhD at the ANU, studying the role of social influences on theory of mind development and behaviour in ni-Vanuatu children. Following this, he conducted postdoctoral research on political views and beliefs in the Pacific, alongside laboratory-based developmental psychology research. Henry crossed over into the public sector as a social and behavioural science advisor at New Zealand's Department of Conservation. In government, he used his background to look at public trust in science, conservation attitudes and awareness, social license and engagement. More recently, he completed a fellowship collaboration between ANU and CSIRO looking at Australian views around synthetic biology. Currently, Henry is a postdoctoral fellow at WSU's node of the Centre of Excellence in Synthetic Biology, investigating public views on the use of SynBio-based tools for greenhouse gas mitigation.

Presenter: Henry Dixon

Discussant: Declan Kuch

Chair: Josh Wodak

Research Alignment:
Environment & Technology

**NEXT SEMINAR:
12 SEPTEMBER**