

2013 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY



REPORT TO THE SETAC-AU MEMBERS

SEPTEMBER 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2013, a survey of the SETAC-AU members was conducted with the aim of developing a strategic direction for the Society through an assessment of:

- 1) the general demographics of SETAC-AU
- 2) the current participation of members
- 3) the sentiment of members towards the Council's management of the Society
- 4) the effectiveness of communication methods and
- 5) the current and potential benefits most valued by the members

A survey consisting of questions around these themes was delivered online to the members. During the 2013 SETAC-AU conference members and attending non-members also had the opportunity to complete hardcopy surveys.

The key findings of the survey were:

- 1) The majority of the respondents were happy with the running of the Society
- 2) Communication strategies with members could be improved
- 3) Members are keen to see any additional benefits. Mentoring schemes, technical workshops and prizes were highly desired by the membership. The majority did not value formal accreditation or webinars.

Five key recommendations were made to the Council

- 1) The Council should make a long-term commitment to the current prizes (i.e. the Honours thesis prize and conference travel awards) and establish specific protocols for their administration
- 2) The Council should consider introducing new prizes for:
 - a) Best postgraduate paper;
 - b) Early and mid-career researchers; and
 - c) A travelling fellowship award, which should include technical workshops
- 3) The Council should consider developing mentoring scheme, including a buddy system for conferences.
- 4) The Council should consider developing a communication strategy for both internal and external promotion and dissemination of information.
- 5) The Council should consider re-surveying the membership in 3 or 4 years, possibly with the help of a consultant.

The Council would like to thank all the members and non-members that participated in this survey.

INTRODUCTION

At the 2012 SETAC-AU the Council identified a need to ensure that the Society membership was growing and at the Annual General Meeting members voted from the establishment of a Strategic Directions Officer. The role was to investigate and report on the current status of the SETAC-AU membership through the gathering and analysis of information, in order to identify strategies to increase membership, as well as increasing the participation of members. Hence, a survey was conducted in 2013 with the aims of determining the:

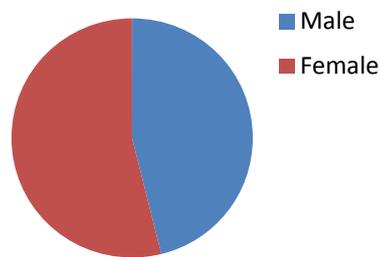
- 1) The general demographics of SETAC-AU;
- 2) The members' current participation;
- 3) The members' sentiment towards the Council's management of the Society;
- 4) The effectiveness of communication methods; and
- 5) The current and potential benefits most valued by the members.

RESULTS

PART 1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

There were 141 respondents of which 54% were females and 46% males. The greatest age range represented in the respondents was the 26-30 age group (18%), which might indicate a cohort of PhD students (Figure 1) and suggests that this group has previously not been retained in the Society. There was also a high portion of respondent with a PhD (60%). The majority of respondents identified as being ecotoxicologists (57%), while 23% identified with environmental chemistry and 6% identified with ecology. 13% identified with other disciplines, such as (human/environmental) toxicology, microbiology, engineering, genetics (Figure 2).

a)



b)

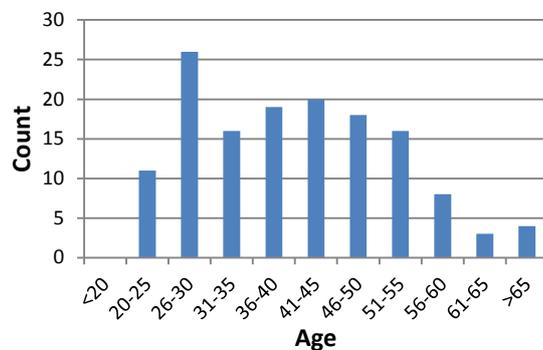


Figure 1 a) Gender and b) age of respondents

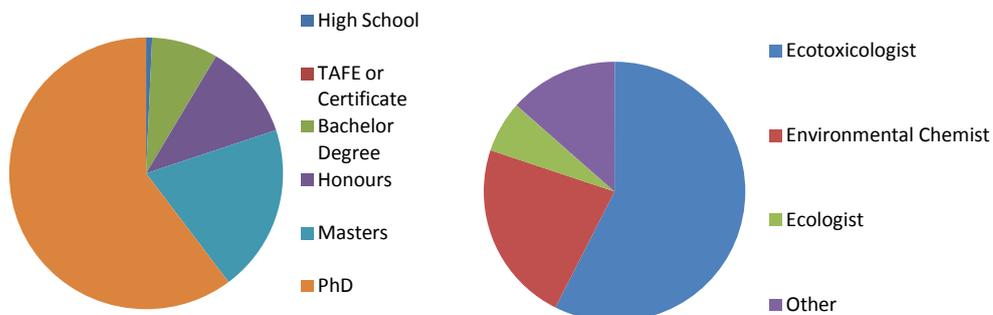


Figure 2 a) Education level and b) discipline of respondents

There was an interesting distribution in the length of membership for the respondents. Namely, the highest percentage of respondents had been members for 2-3 years (23%) but this was closely followed by respondents that had been members for >12 years (22%) (Figure 3). 18% of respondents had also been members for less than one year.

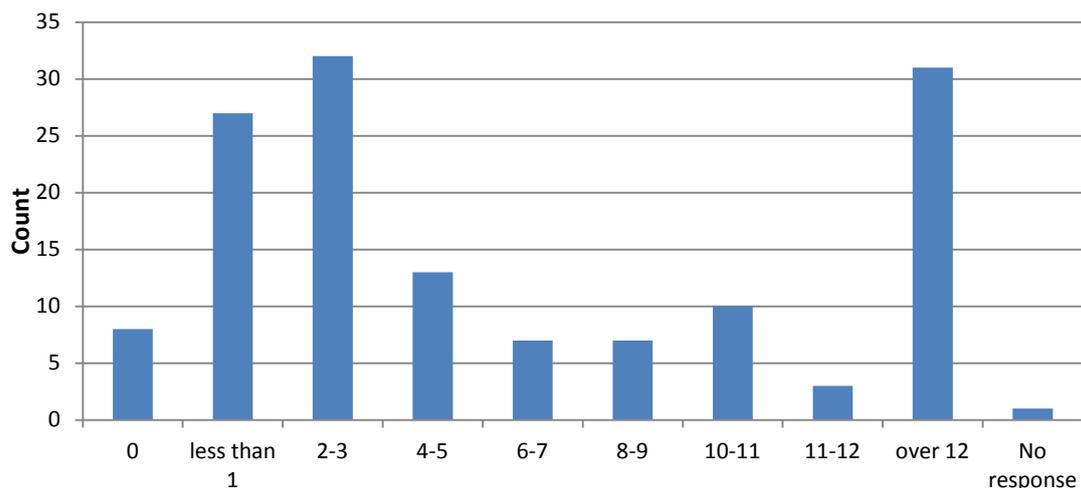


Figure 3 Years of membership

PART 2 SENTIMENT TOWARDS THE SOCIETY AND THE COUNCIL

The majority of respondents ranked professional development as the primary reason they were SETAC-AU members. Contact with peers ranked second and the other provided options all ranked evenly (Figure 4). Access to the SETAC journals and reduced page charges for publishing in the SETAC journals were also mentioned in the free text responses.

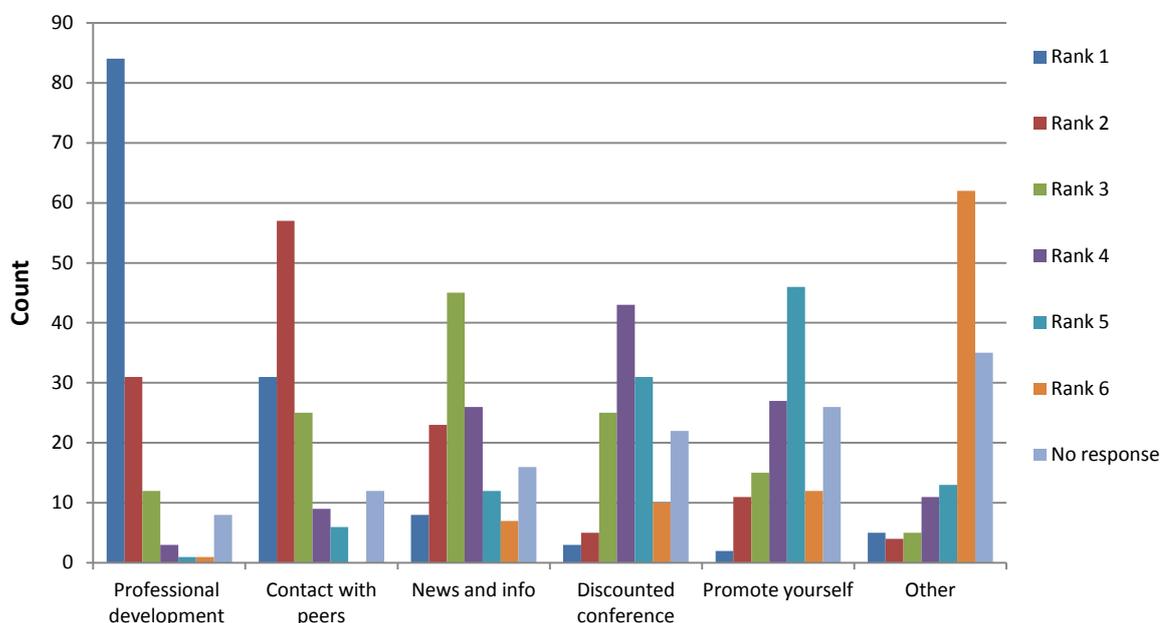


Figure 4 Reasons for SETAC-AU membership

The majority of respondent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “being a member of SETAC-AU keeps me up-to-date with the latest developments in ecotoxicology and environmental chemistry”. In general, the respondents also were

agreeable with their ability to interact with SETAC-AU members outside of conferences (Figure 5) and many agreed that meetings led to further collaborations.

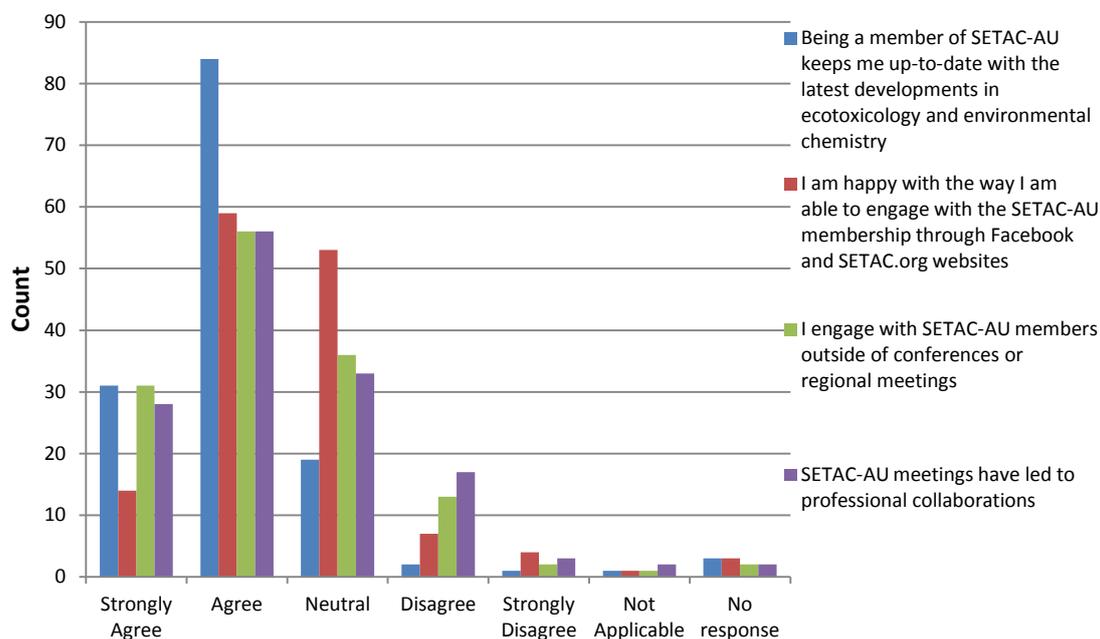


Figure 5 Interactions with SETAC-AU members

The majority of members agreed that they were being adequately informed of SETAC activities through the Endpoint and Globe newsletters. The respondents were more neutral concerning their engagement with the Council. Most respondents agreed that the SETAC-AU conferences were value for money. There was a more neutral response concerning respondents finding employment opportunities through the Society (Figure 6).

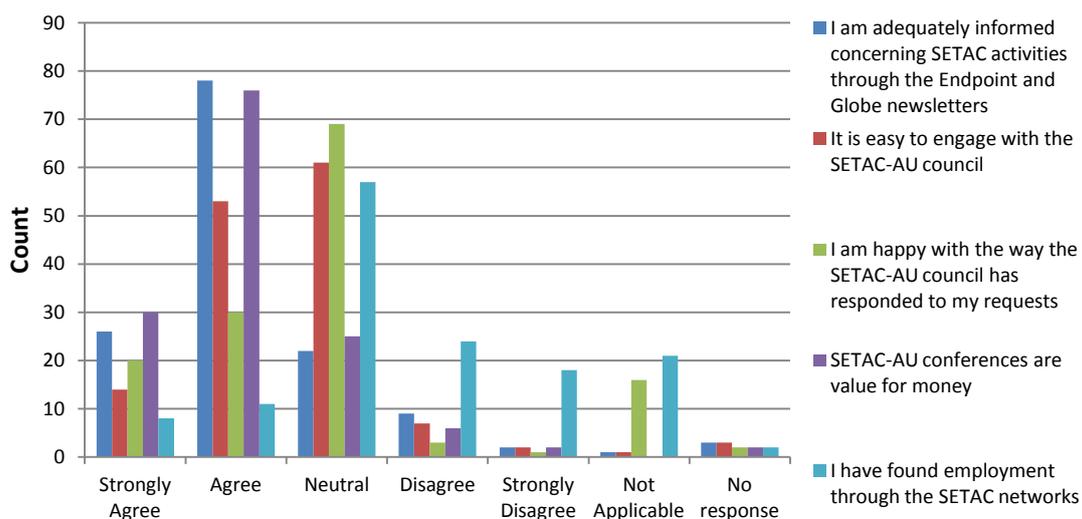


Figure 6 Interaction with the SETAC-AU Council

The majority of respondents agreed that they were happy with the Council’s management of the Society. No respondents disagreed with this statement (Figure 7). The majority of respondent also strongly agreed or agreed that they would remain members on a long-term basis.

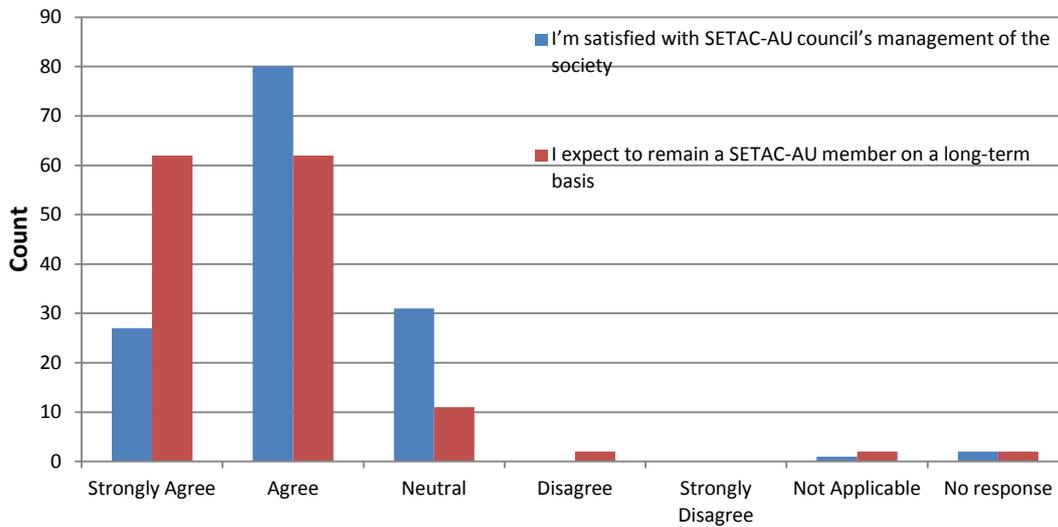


Figure 7 Satisfaction with the SETAC-AU Council

PART 3 MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOCIETY

Primarily respondents answered that they rarely attended regional meetings (43%), which was closely followed by respondents stating they went as often as they could (39%). On reflection, the response “As often as I can” is uninformative and should not have been made an option (Figure 8).

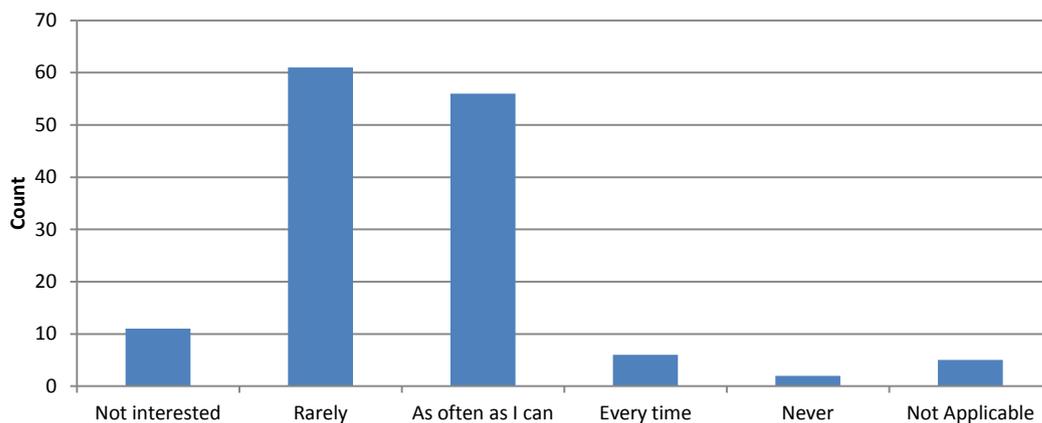


Figure 8 Participation in regional meetings

The highest proportion of respondents answered that they always attended national conferences (32%) and 24% of respondents also answered that they attended about every second national conference. However, respondents answering that they only attended occasionally (26%) also ranked highly. Hence, a large proportion of respondents regularly went to national conferences but a noteworthy proportion of respondents were not attending regularly. In contrast, 30% of respondents answered that they had never been to an international SETAC meeting and 30% answered that they occasionally attended (Figure 9). This is probably not surprising considering the additional costs associated with international travel.

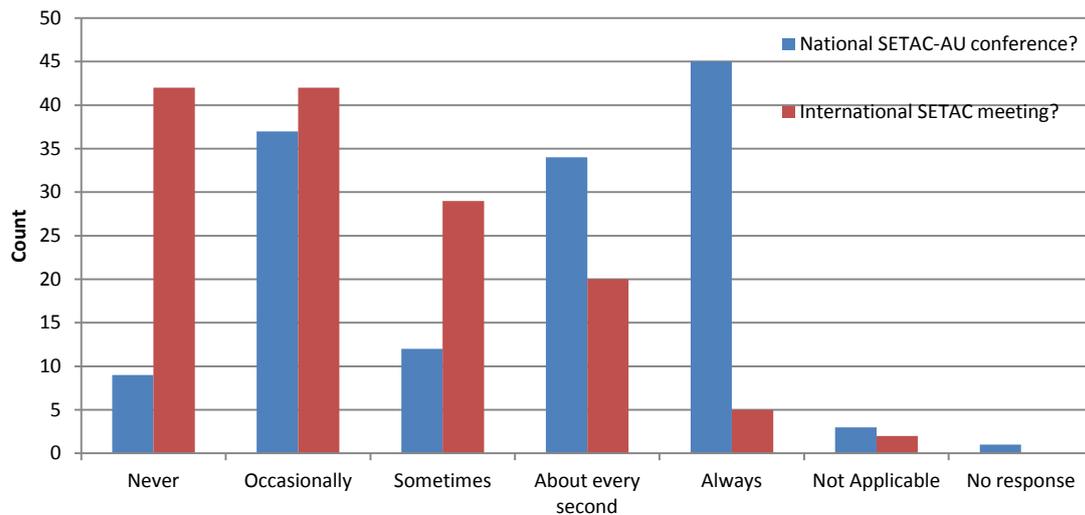


Figure 9 Participation in national and international SETAC meetings

A large proportion of respondents answered that they would like to be more involved with the SETAC-AU (Figure 10). Primarily, respondents rank their lack of time available as the highest reason for not being more involved. Respondents generally agreed or were neutral that more experience, a need to be involved and being personally approached would be reason to be more involved but there was no discernible pattern in the ranking of these answers. Respondents largely disagreed that being more involved in the Society had no benefit to them (Figure 11 and 12).

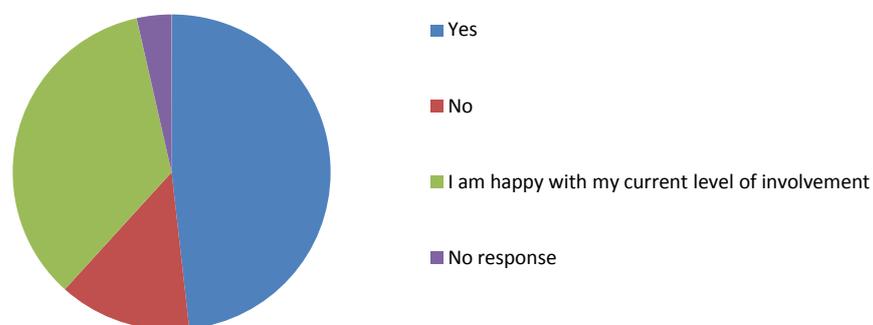


Figure 10 Desire to be more involved in the Society

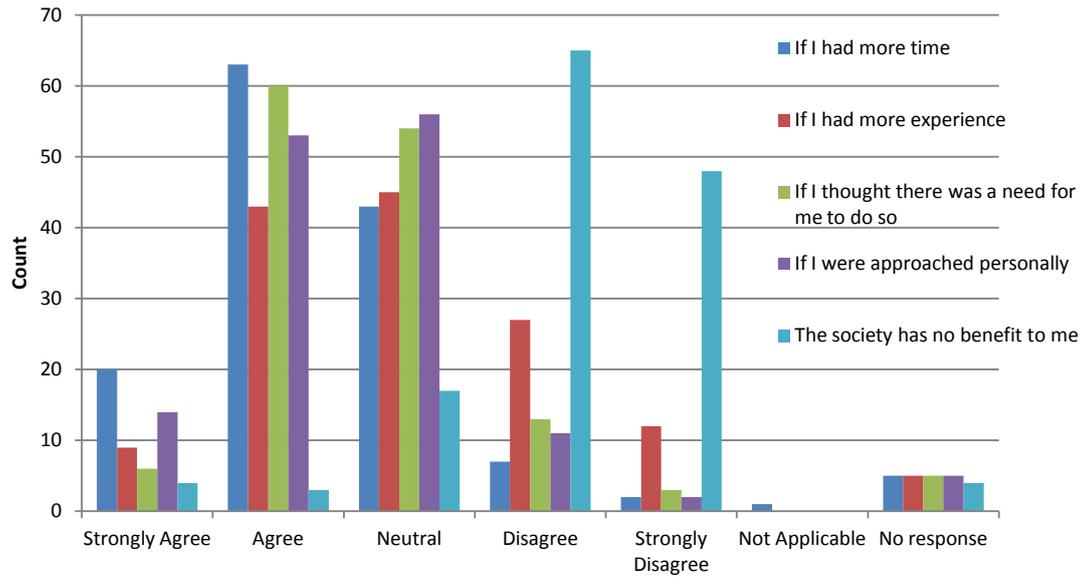


Figure 11 Reasons preventing more involvement in the Society

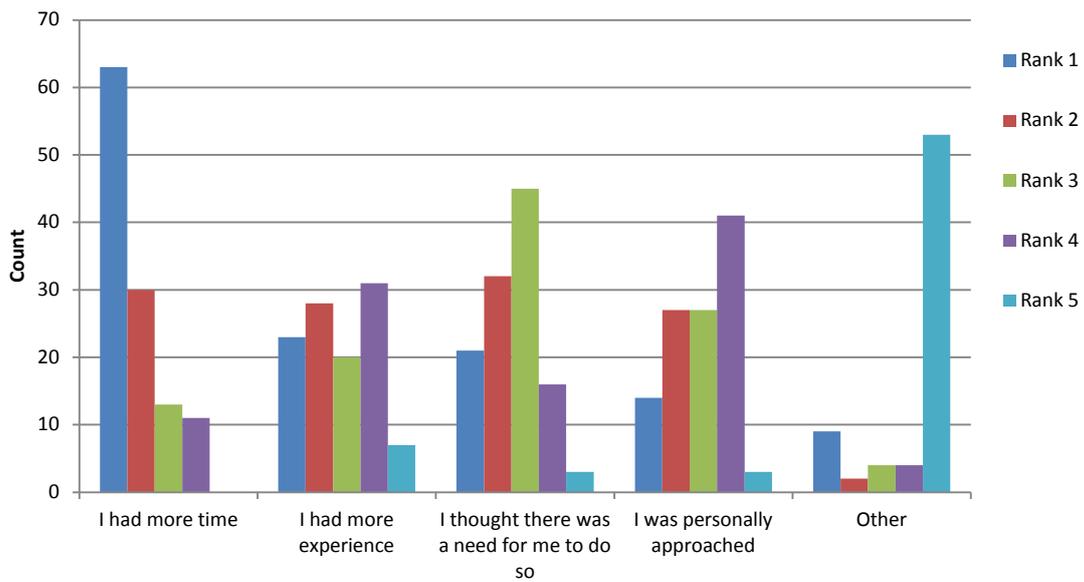


Figure 12 Ranked reasons preventing more involvement in the Society

PART 4 COMMUNICATION IN SETAC-AU

Respondents answering the hardcopy version of the survey were asked if they received the Globe newsletter, the Endpoint newsletter and SETAC-AU emails. Only 55, 45 and 56% of respondents answered yes to this question, respectively, but it should be noted that some of these respondent may not have been SETAC-AU members (Figure 13)

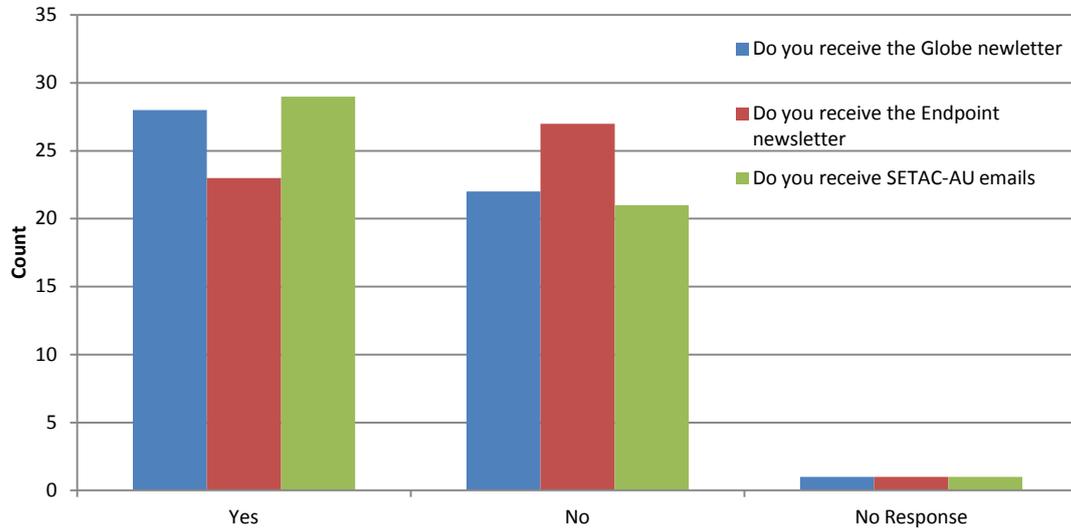


Figure 13 Hardcopy respondent's access to newsletters and emails

The majority of respondents found the time to read the SETAC-AU emails and newsletters. These communication methods appear to have a more frequent readership compared to Globe. The journals readership was likely to be lower due to the nature of the content (Figure 14). The web-based methods of communication (Facebook page and SETAC.org) appeared to have very little uptake with the majority of respondents stating that they'd never visited the SETAC-AU Facebook page and didn't often visit the SETAC.org site. There appears to be very little use of the SETAC.org functions (Figure 15).

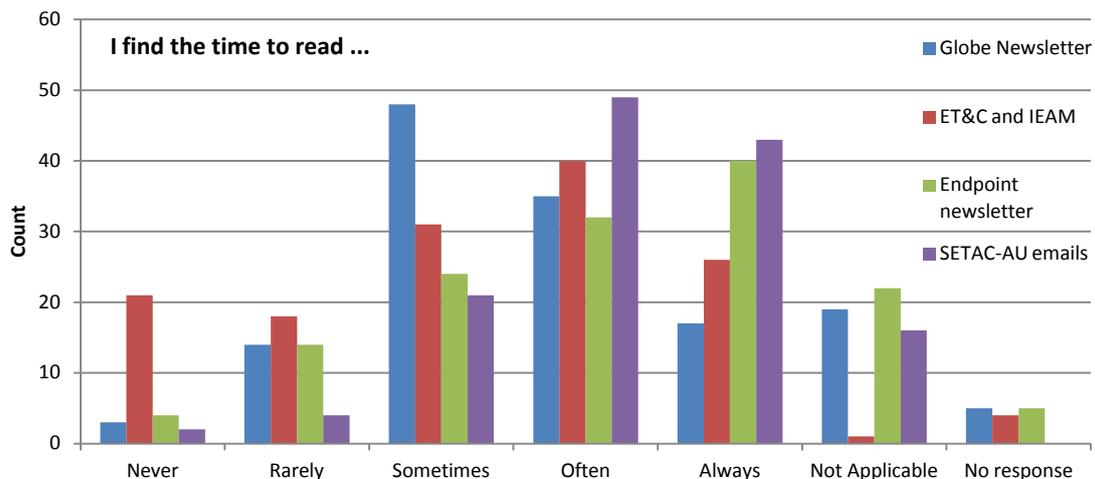


Figure 14 Frequency of reading SETAC communications

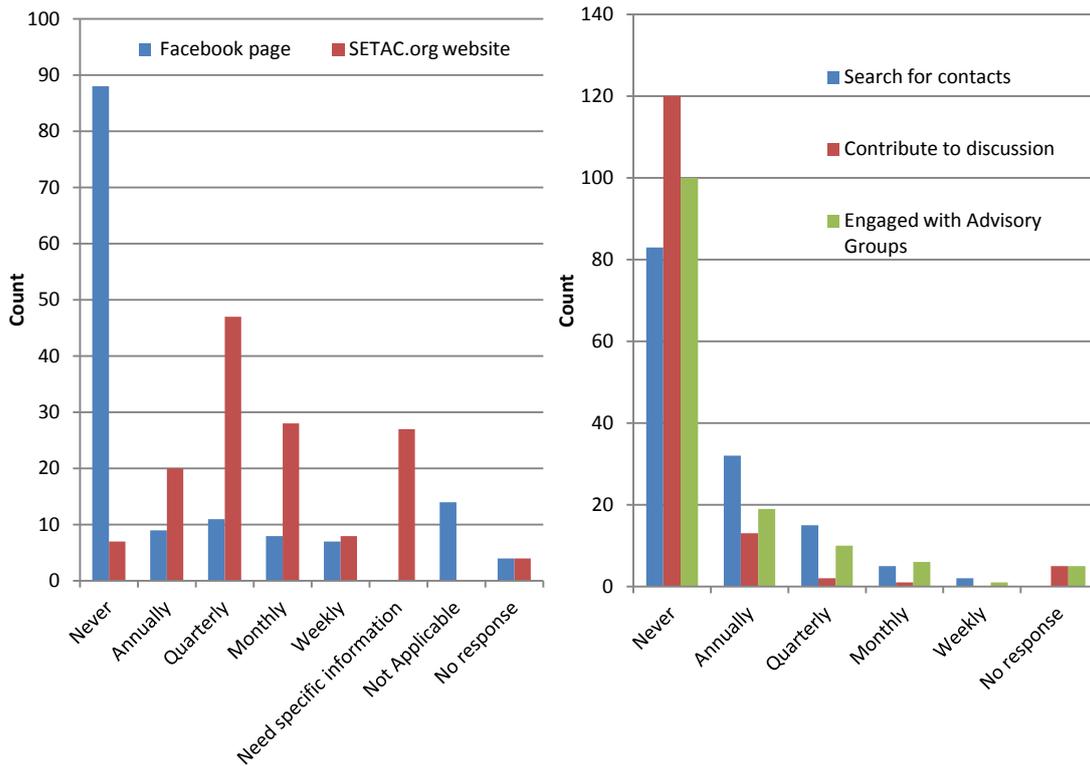


Figure 15 Use of web-based SETAC resources

PART 5 CURRENT AND PROPOSED SETAC-AU BENEFITS

In general, the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they highly valued the benefits being offered at the time of the survey. Conference discounts and access to the journals appeared to be the most favoured benefits (Figure 16).

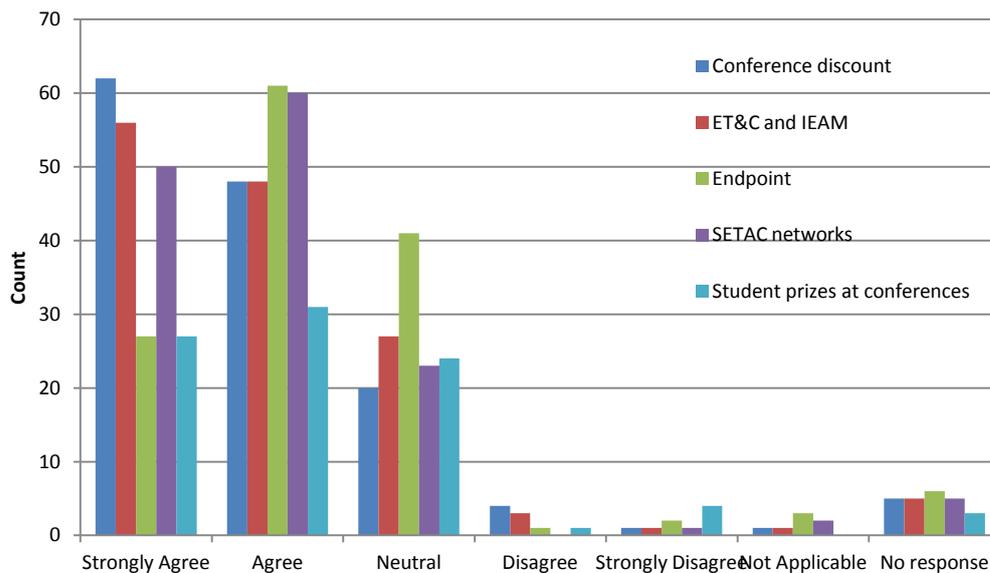


Figure 16 Benefits offered at the time of the survey

The majority of respondents said that SETAC Advisory Groups (AGs) and Student travel awards were not applicable to them. Of those that thought SETAC-AGs and the Student travel awards were applicable to them, 57% and 49% of respondents claimed they had used the SETAC-AGs and Student Travel award benefits, respectively (Figure 17).

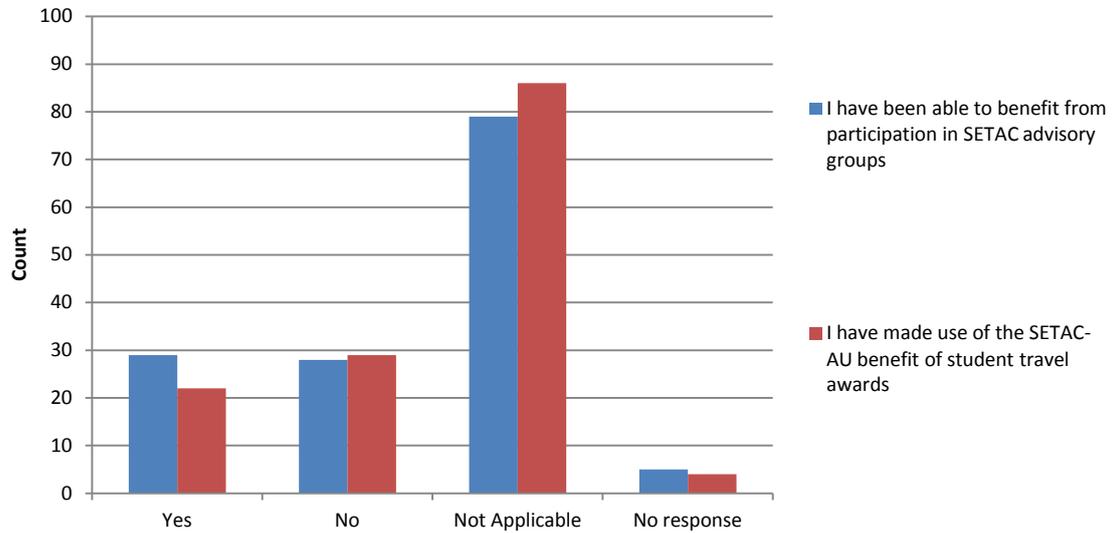


Figure 17 Members uptake of SETAC Advisory Groups and student travel awards

Respondents completing the electronic survey (90 respondents) ranked the proposed mentoring scheme and technical workshops highest, with an average of rank of 4.0. However, there was a noteworthy split in the ranking of the technical workshops with 21% ranking it 1st and 24% ranking technical workshops as their 7th preference. The proposal for a best student paper and travel awards ranked highly an average rank of 4.1. There was less interest in regional forums and was very little interest in formal accreditation and webinars (Figure 18).

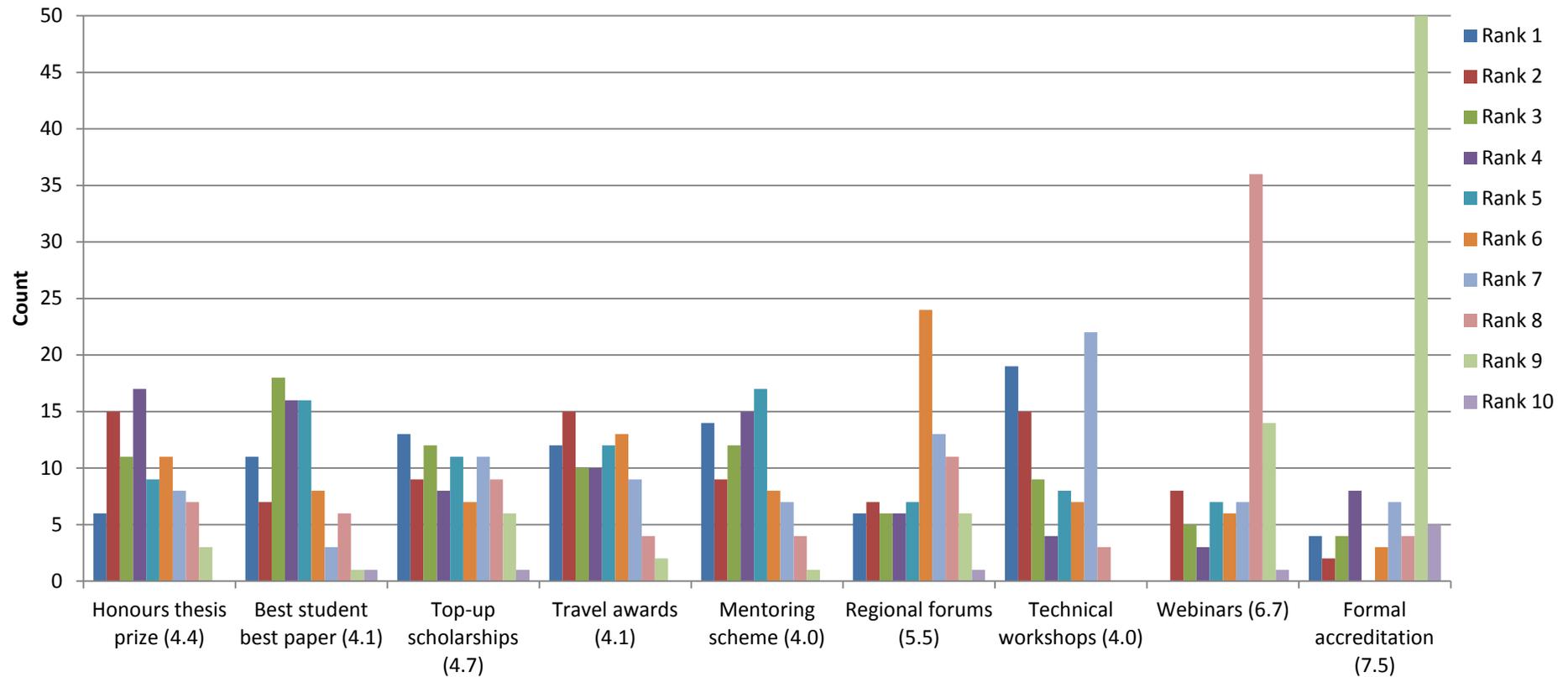


Figure 18 Responses to proposed benefits (electronic survey)

Unfortunately, the hardcopy survey (51 respondents) omitted the option of best student paper, and the responses from hardcopies needed separation from the electronic responses for a balanced analysis. Travel awards were clearly ranked 1st by hardcopy respondents, which was also a benefit also ranked highly by electronic respondents. This was followed by top-up scholarships, which was ranked much lower by electronic respondents. Hardcopy respondents ranked a mentoring scheme and technical workshops 3rd and 4th. Similarly to the electronic response, the Honours thesis prize ranked 5th and the formal accreditation, webinars and regional forums ranked last in the proposed benefits.

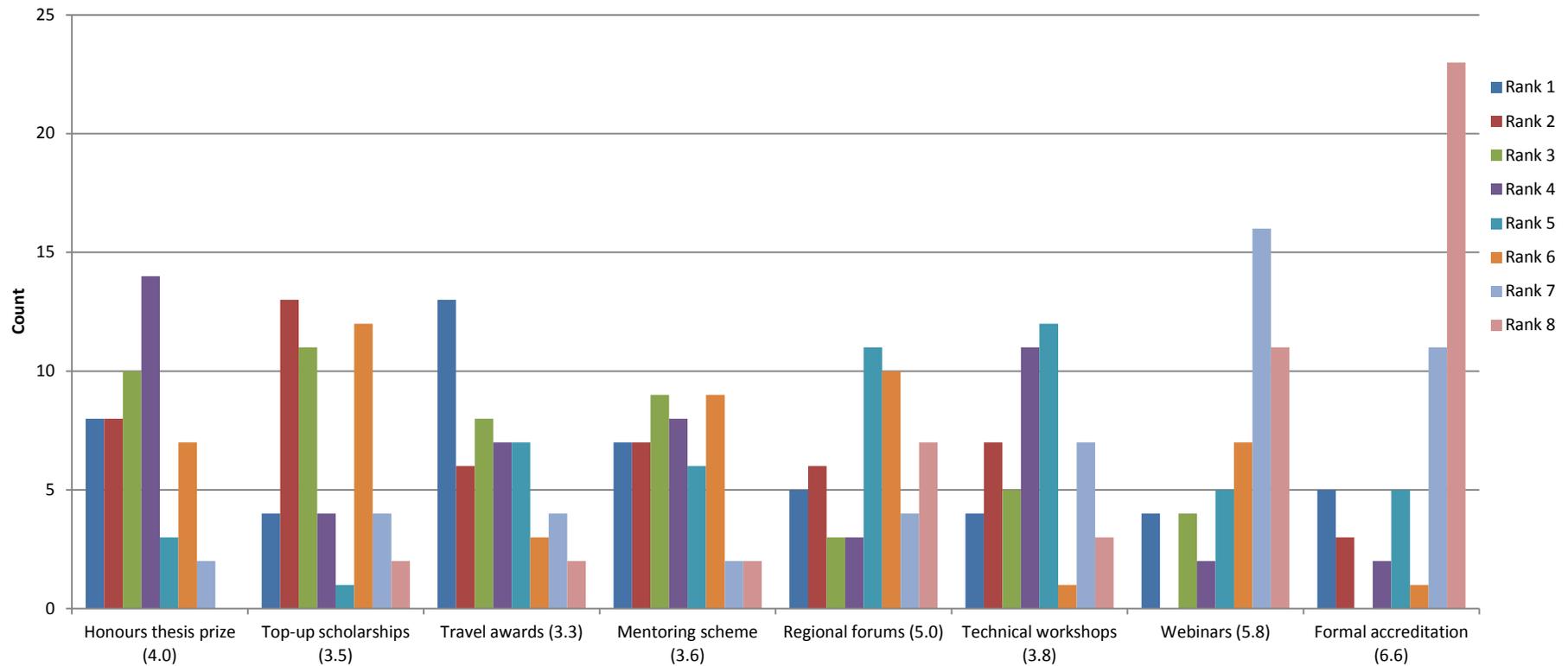


Figure 19 Responses to proposed benefits (hardcopy survey, note no best student paper option)

DISCUSSION

In addition to the responses shown in the results, a number of comments and suggestions were provided in the free text fields. Some of the suggestions and comments have been provided in Appendix A. All comments were appreciated and have been noted by the Council.

Within the SETAC-AU membership there appears an even gender balance and the majority of members identify as being ecotoxicologists (57%). There is a large cohort of members aged 26-30, which is likely to align the group that have been with Society for 1-3 years. Engaging with this cohort and retaining this group of members will be an important challenge for the future of the Society.

The majority of respondents attend national conferences for reasons of professional development and state that the Society keeps them up-to-date with the field. There appears to be good professional relationships in the Society and collaborations and communication is healthy outside of conferences. Most people were willing to participate more in the Society and said that their biggest inhibition was a lack of time.

Communication within the Society appears to be a challenge. Many members stated that they are not receiving emails and/or newsletters. Web-based tools of communication and social media are not showing much uptake. The exact reason for these issues needs some investigation and the best way to communicate with the membership needs consideration.

Most respondents highly valued the current benefits of reduced conference registration and journal access. The respondents were agreeable to all proposed additional benefits. When ranking benefits it appeared that mentoring schemes would be highly valued. Technical workshops were also highly valued, as were travel awards and prizes. Formal accreditation, webinars and regional workshops were ranked lower in the members' priorities.

METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

An electronic survey was circulated one week prior to the 2013 SETAC-AU conference. The questions covered five aforementioned themes. 90 members completed the survey online. It was also decided at the Melbourne conference that additional hardcopy surveys could be completed. The aim of this was to gather the data of additional members, but also in particular, non-members that were present at the conference. It was also thought to reduce bias that might have been caused due to the online delivery method.

The method had two noteworthy limitations. Firstly, there were inconsistencies between the electronic and hardcopy versions. For the most part these were deliberately introduced to gather additional information from those respondents answering the hardcopy, e.g. were they receiving communications. However, the option on "best student paper" was omitted from the hardcopy version. This meant that the two versions could not be merged for the ranking of proposed benefits and they have been presented separately in this report. The other noteworthy limitation is that the survey was conducted in association with an incentive (i.e. an iPad prize). Including an

incentive increases the participation rate of surveys, but is known to introduce bias in the response as respondents are more likely to respond positively to the questions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following broad conclusions can be made from the survey;

- 1) The majority of the respondents were happy with the running of the Society
- 2) Communicating with the members could be improved
- 3) Members are keen to see any additional benefits. Mentoring schemes, technical workshops and prizes were highly desired by the membership. The majority did not value formal accreditation or webinars.

Five key recommendations were made to the Council

- 1) The Council should make a long-term commitment to the current prizes (i.e. the Honours thesis prize and conference travel awards) and establish specific protocols for their administration
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- 5) The Council should consider re-surveying the membership in 3 or 4 years, possibly with the help a consultant.

APPENDIX A SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR THE SOCIETY

Job recruiting events and mentoring for new researchers
More regular meetings (relatively informal) of special interest groups or regional groups might be a good idea.
Social gathering
Regional workshops including New Zealand
The current diversity of SETAC activities is well fit for purpose.
Mentoring programs
Industry-science liaison groups or, even better, form links between scientists and government.
More regional meetings
Workshops to improve professional development especially methods, statistics etc
More regional meetings/activities.
webinars
Local meetings on bi annual basis
Webinars
Networking activities
more specialised workshops.
More student workshops and training for early career researchers
More activities or involvement for student members or members with less experience
I think the activities the Society offers are perfect for my other commitments
Short courses?
Informal regional seminar/get togethers like I started in ASE
The occasional SETAC seminar with time to network afterwards that was held in my local city holding workshops
Occasional seminars either as a touring or local basis that are more affordable/accessible than attending a national conference and do not require special work approval to attend
1. More communication; 2. online discussion and comments on any current scientific issue ; 3. more publication facilities
Student events providing information on things like employment opportunities and career advancement
Workshops
Social get togethers with SETAC members in your city to catch up with what people are doing throughout the year.
Please organize more workshops
The Society could provide short course trainings for members in Papua New Guinea
More short courses
Scholarships for students
More workshops on specific topics
It would be nice if there were more awards for students. The North American SETAC group has a number of student awards and it would be good if we could replicate those or do something similar.
programme of certification of technical qualifications or experience
More state level networking opportunities (informal meetings, dinners, pub nights etc)
Joint forums with AWA, EIANZ, etc
Providing more information on research advancement and funding opportunities
Online seminars where possible?
Coordinate SETAC publications on Aussie issues
research training, regular research seminars, career talks
More local workshops
More engagement with other SETAC specialist groups

If the board thinks other disciplines should be encouraged eg by special sessions at conferences then that might be helpful

Webinars?

contact persons based on their expertise as evidenced by publications and build a network of experts and apply for grants to solve complex problems in toxicology field

More government involvement.

Workshops during the year. Be more involved in national issues. Do Australian Pelston like meetings. More formal mentoring programs.

Technical workshops?

courses

Joint meetings with ASL.

Special symposia

Regional workshops on emerging contaminants when WQ guidelines are released.

Regional meetings; info on developments in regions eg NSW

regional social meetings to help increase connections and collaboration

More analytical chemistry

Workshops/symposium

Job recruiting events, forums, mentoring for new students or recent graduates

travel awards for students in the Pacific to attend the conference

How about a best researcher award, perhaps split into awards for early, mid and late career level researchers.

Job internship placement for PhDs

Annual awards for ECR would be worth considering as would sustained research excellence and would not cost the Society much.