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Telecommunications & the Digital Economy

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Home > 2016 Charles Todd Medal awarded to Simon Poole

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TelSoc News and Events

20th October 2016

[1]

★ 41 [2]

The Charles Todd Medal is awarded annually 'for outstanding contributions to telecommunications', and is the most prestigious award made by the Australian telecommunications industry to any of its members. Recent Charles Todd Medallists have been Teresa Corbin, Simon Hackett, Michael Malone and Mike Quigley. A full list of past medallists can be found [here](#) [3]. [4]

[5] At the 2016 Charles Todd Oration event in Sydney on 19 October, Professor Peter Gerrand, Chair of the TelSoc Selection Panel, awarded the 2016 Medallist to Dr Simon Poole, saying:

"Simon Poole is a technologist and entrepreneur who has made outstanding contributions to the world's optical fibre infrastructure.

"It can be truly said that Simon Poole's research and commercial innovations have been crucial in making long-distance optical fibre infrastructure possible today: particularly his work on optical amplifiers, Bragg gratings and optical switching."

His early research career

Simon Poole obtained his PhD from Southampton University in 1987 and was a key member of the team that invented the Erbium-Doped Fibre Amplifier (EDFA) during his postgraduate work.

The EDFA avoids the need for electrical regeneration in optical communication links. Since the late-1990s, this has been the key enabler for the deployment of low cost, long span optical communications systems, both above land and beneath the oceans, around the world. Without the optical amplifier, it is hard to imagine how our world's telecommunication infrastructure and the Internet could have become so extensively interconnected and with such very high bandwidths as they use today.

Research leadership

In 1988, Simon moved to Australia and became joint founder of the Optical Fibre Technology Centre at the University of Sydney, which subsequently became part of the Australian Photonics Cooperative Research Centre. He was director of the CRC's Sydney node from 1991 to 1995 and oversaw the creation of considerable human capital, intellectual expertise and an entrepreneurial spirit in optical technology – with long lasting impact for Australia. His colleagues say that this was due in large part to his leadership, "which always projected strong competence, enthusiasm and inclusiveness, combined with an infectious positive attitude".

Commercial entrepreneurship

Dr Poole has created and led two very successful start-ups in Australia: Indx in 1995 and Engana in year 2001. These have grown into companies playing a leading role in the manufacture and export of key components of the global optical fibre network, and have generated in aggregate more than \$900 million in revenue to date.

Indx's eventual owner JDSU employed over 300 staff in Sydney and at its peak exported over \$100m in components each year.

As CEO of Engana, Simon raised VC funding and oversaw the development of Engana's market-leading Wavelength Selective Switches (WSS). Engana was acquired by Finisar, and now employs 220 people in Sydney and a similar number in China. Annual sales of WSS exceed \$120m and Finisar Australia became established as a clear world market leader in this field, with 40% of the global market.

In 2008, Dr Poole started the New Business Ventures Group within Finisar to generate high value added businesses. Building on collaborative research with the University of Sydney, Finisar has developed the WaveShaper range of Programmable Optical Processors which are now used globally as a key tool in the development of next generation optical communication systems.

In summary

[6] Peter Gerrand concluded, "These are just a few of Simon's extraordinary achievements.

"You can see that he has made a substantial contribution to this country and to the world in the development and commercialisation of new technologies that underpin both the high performance and the low cost of our global communications network.

"He has contributed substantially to solving the 'tyranny of distance' problem for Australia, which parallels the pioneering work and interests of Sir Charles Todd."

The Selection Panel for TelSoc's 2016 Charles Todd Medal consisted of John Stanton, Laurie Patton, Teresa Corbin, Allan Horsley, Tim Herring, Graham Shepherd and Peter Gerrand (chair).

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[9]

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Links

[1] <https://www.addtoany.com/share?url=https%3A%2F%2Ftelsoc.org%2Fnews%2F2016-charles-todd-medal-awarded-simon-poole&title=2016%20Charles%20Todd%20Medal%20awarded%20to%20Simon%20Poole> [2]

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http://telsoc.org/article_page/2016-08-25/industry_awards [4]

http://telsoc.org/sites/default/files/images/news/publicity_photo_2016_ctm_sp_pg.jpg [5]

https://telsoc.org/sites/default/files/images/news/ct_medallist_simon_poole_0.jpg [6]

https://telsoc.org/sites/default/files/images/news/publicity_photo_2016_ctm_sp_pg.jpg [7] <https://telsoc.org> [8]

<https://telsoc.org/contact/newsletters> [9] <https://telsoc.org/topics/telsoc-news>