



Australian Government



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A German Malaria Researcher in Canberra: Dr. Alex Maier

Malaria is usually associated with tropical climates and third-world countries, and people forget that it is still one of the world's greatest killers. This is why German scientist Dr Alex Maier has dedicated his research to this dangerous parasite: he investigates molecules involved in malaria pathogenesis and transmission using biochemical, molecular, genetic and cell biological techniques. The long-term goal is to identify and develop new intervention strategies against malaria – and Alex Maier is doing it all in Australia!

After completing his PhD in Germany, Alex came to Australia in 2000 with a post-doctoral fellowship from the German Research Council (DFG). He first worked at the Walter-and-Eliza-Hall Institute and later at La Trobe University in Melbourne with a Fellowship by the Australian Research Council (ARC). In 2012 joined the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra, where he now holds a tenured position.

Like many other German academics that came to Australia as PhD students or post-docs, Alex fell in love with Australia and never left. Yet he actively maintained and built strong research connections with Germany. A fellowship from the Alexander-von-Humboldt-Foundation enabled Alex to repeatedly visit colleagues in Berlin between 2012 and 2015. Building on the research links established during this time, Alex spearheaded the establishment of an International Research Training Group, “Crossing boundaries: molecular interactions in Malaria” in 2017, funded jointly by the DFG, HU Berlin and the ANU. This unique research partnership links the complementary malaria expertise of the two universities, and will train 75 PhD students over the next 9 years. All research projects involve work carried out in both Berlin and Canberra and PhD students will graduate with a dual PhD from both the Humboldt University and the Australian National University. Learn more about the German-Australian Malaria-Alliance here <https://www.allianceberlincanberra.org/>

Please find a more detailed profile of Dr. Maier on <https://biology.anu.edu.au/people/alexander-maier> and watch his research story on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6s10FL04qAk> (short version) or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UZtKzoh6HM> (long version)



[Read the detailed interview here:](#)

How long have you been in Australia and why did you decide to come here?

I moved to Melbourne in 2000 with the support of a fellowship from the German Research Council (DFG). At that time there were two laboratories (one at NIH and one in Melbourne) that had developed techniques to genetically manipulate the malaria parasite and I wanted to learn and apply these techniques.

What do you like most about Australia and why did you stay?

The generous and good-natured people and the spectacular Australian nature. I enjoy the fact that often within minutes you can be at places that appear to be untouched by human activity.

What excites you most about the Australian research/academic landscape?

I very much appreciate the make-do attitude. Especially the Australian parasitologists have formed a very collegiate and supportive network that allows a very active scientific discourse and enables researchers to take their projects beyond their immediate areas of expertise.

What do you miss about Germany, also with respect to research/academia?

Since so many jobs in Germany depend on research and innovation the attitude of the general public and mindset of politicians towards science is much more positive. In Germany, the value of basic research is inherently accepted, but at the same time there seem to be a much more realistic understanding of the investments and time-frames required to convert basic findings into tangible outcomes. On a personal level I miss the variety of theatre performances and of course family and friends.

Why is it important for you to stay connected with German colleagues and how do you maintain your research links to Germany?

There is significant synergy between Australian and German research. I enjoy hearing about the newest developments in Germany and adopt them in the Australian context, but at the same time it is great to be able to share my thoughts and experiences. Over the years my connections to the German research community had faded a little bit and being awarded a Humboldt Fellowship in 2012 re-kindled relationships, opened many new doors for collaborations and provided unique perspectives. It allowed me to utilise my insights into both the German and Australian research landscapes and hopefully to come up with solutions that amalgamate the best of the two systems. I had split the AvH fellowship over 3 years and over this period of time the momentum and interest grew beyond our group and the group of my host Prof. Kai Matuschewski at the Max-Planck-Institute for Infection Biology (now Humboldt-University). We wanted to give other colleagues an opportunity for this bilateral exchange too, especially young researchers, and applied for an International Research Training Group (IRTG). With the IRTG being established we intend to expand our exchanges into the undergraduate teaching space, to add additional partners to the network and engage more with non-academic stakeholders like industry and government departments.