Analysis of gender and institutional representation of invited speakers at the ANS annual meeting

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Australasian Neuroscience Society

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Background and Aims

The ANS 2024-2028 strategic plan lists promotion of invited presentations at large major conferences like ANS as critical for career progression. However, the scientific program of conferences worldwide has poorly reflected the diversity of scientists in those fields.

In 2017, the ANS Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee proposed a new policy: *(binary) gender balance of invited and selected talks at the ANS annual meeting should reflect the overall reported gender balance of ANS membership.* This was ratified by council in 2019.

AIMS: Here, we analyse publicly available data on invited speakers at the ANS conference focussing on plenaries (1981-2024) and symposia (2009, 2016-2024), to assess the impact of this policy on gender balance in representation at the annual meeting. We additionally analysed geographic representation.

## Results: Gender balance

Plenary speakers

Representation of women in prestigious plenary speaking roles has increased markedly across the last 40 years. Women were <10% of plenary speakers before 2004, reaching ~40% by 2019, and further increasing to 50% by 2020-2024.
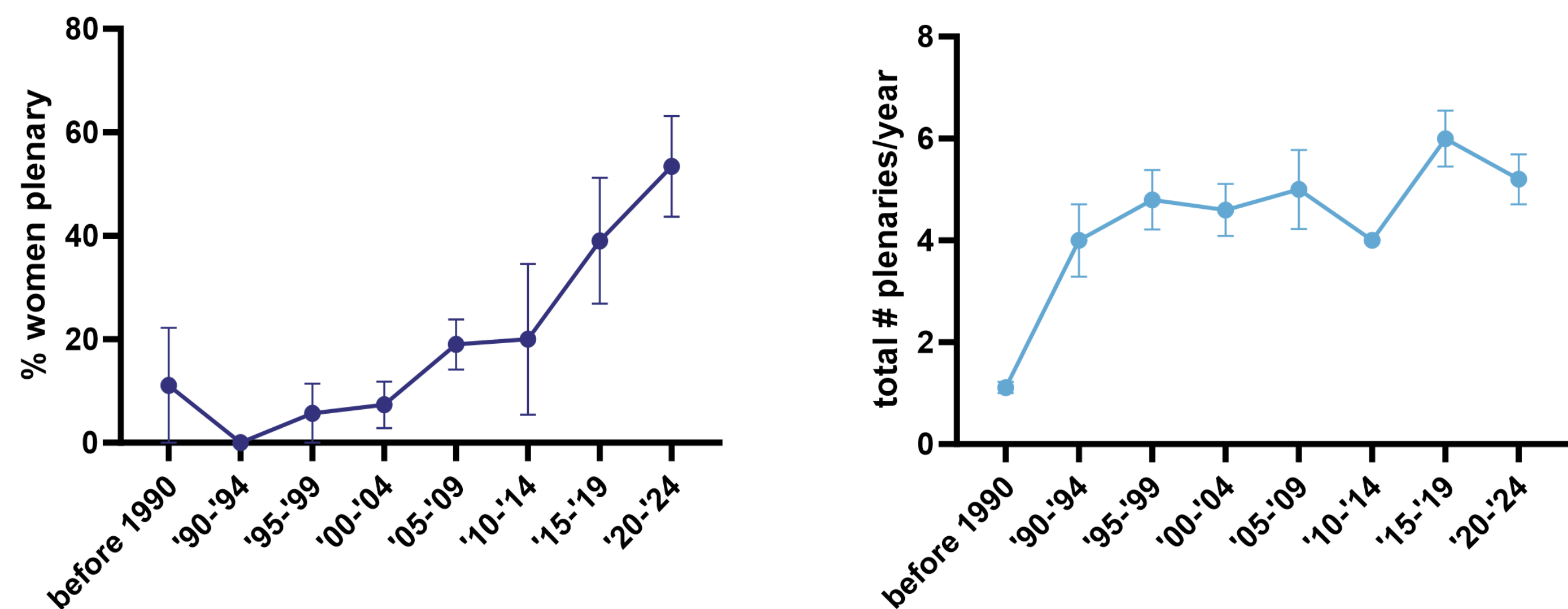
Symposia speakers

Representation of female speakers in symposia has sharply increased since the gender equity policy was enacted, improving from 40% women in 2019 to nearly 60% by 2024.
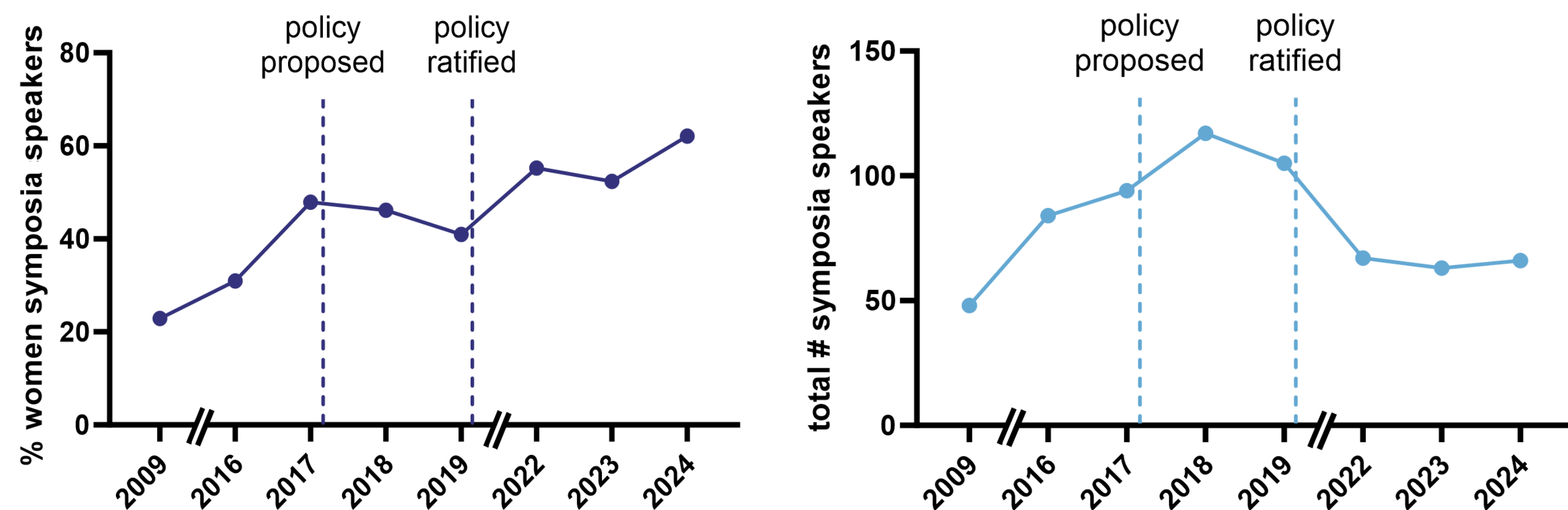
Summary

Over time, the gender balance of plenary speakers at the annual meeting has shifted to better reflect the representation in membership. This outcome can be directly linked to enactment of the gender equity policy in 2019. Geographic representation, however, is increasingly heavily skewed toward Australian representation.

Future Directions

These data view gender as a binary and several groups are likely to be under-represented amongst ANS speakers (e.g. LGBTQIA+, First Nations, people with disabilities). To meet the Society's goals of equity and inclusion, we will develop more comprehensive reporting tools to ensure equity of representation, and partner with under-represented groups to create safer spaces for marginalised voices in neuroscience research so opportunities are accessible to all members.

Acknowledgements

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Results: Geographic representation

Plenary speakers

From 1981-2024, nearly 60% (n=113) of 178 plenary speakers were from Australian institutions, with only 5 speakers from New Zealand institutions. Globally, 32 speakers were from the USA, 7 from the UK, and 6 from Germany.

1981 - 2024

Australia = 63.5%
New Zealand = 2.8%
USA = 18%
Other = 33.7%
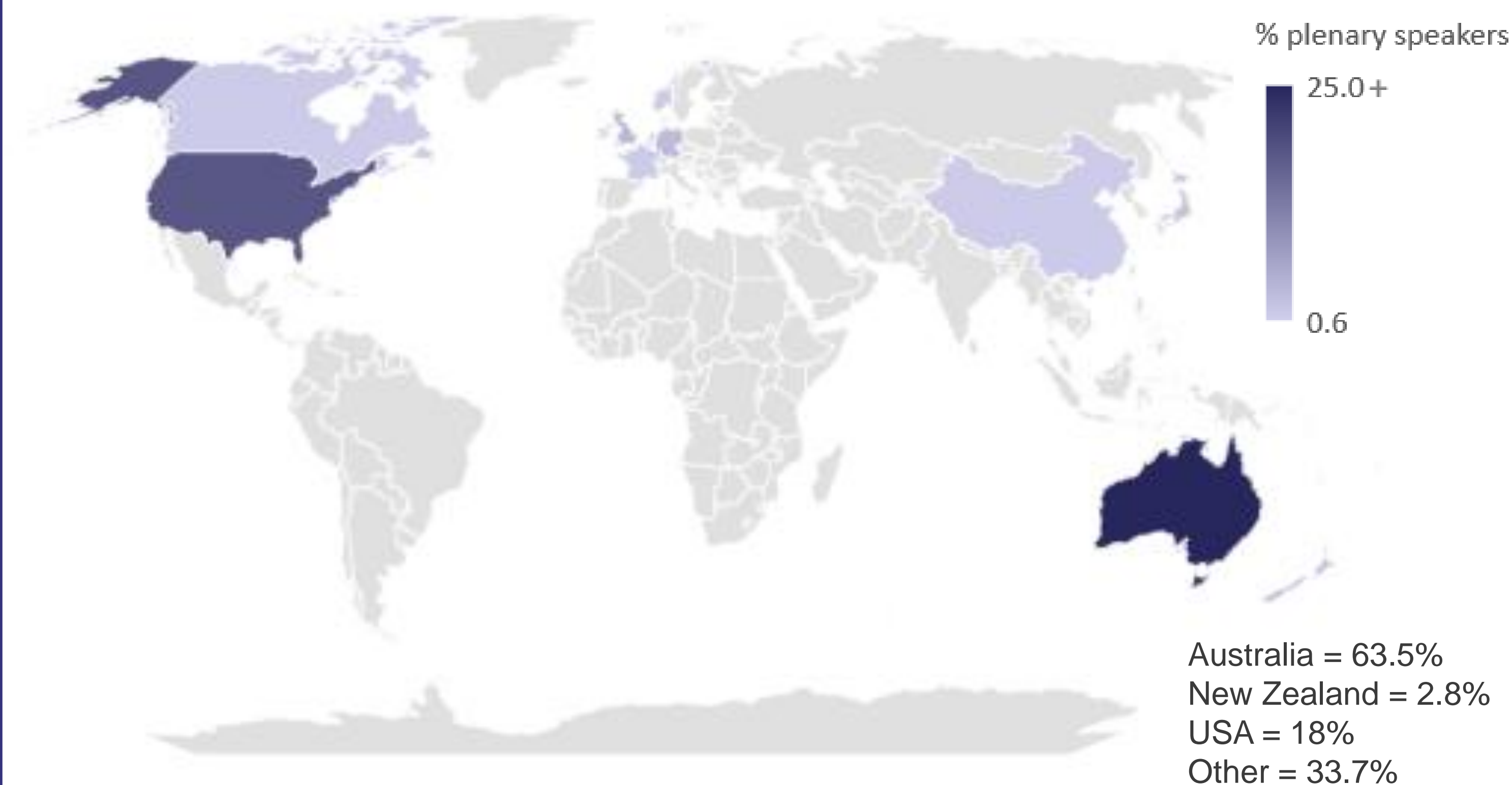
Symposia speakers

An increasing majority of symposia speakers are from Australian institutions, with proportions increasing from ~70% to nearly 85% since 2009. The proportion of speakers from New Zealand institutions is slowly increasing over the same period.

2022 - 2024

Australia = 84.7%
New Zealand = 6.1%
USA = 3.6%
Other = 9.2%

2016-2019

Australia = 77.8%
New Zealand = 5.8%
USA = 8.8%
Other = 16.5%

2009

Australia = 70.2%
New Zealand = 2.1%
USA = 10.6%
Other = 27.7%