

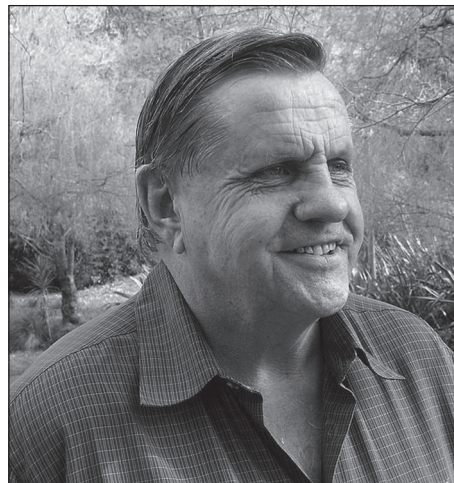
---

## News

# Professor Emeritus David Penny honoured by National Academy of Sciences

Professor Emeritus David Penny of Massey University is among 21 distinguished scientists named as foreign associates of the National Academy of Sciences on 1 May this year. This is one of the highest honours in the science world, awarded in recognition of outstanding original research; nearly 500 members of the Academy have won Nobel Prizes. He is just the third living New Zealander to receive the honour, the others being Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond of the University of Auckland, and Emeritus Professor Douglas Coombs of the University of Otago.

Professor Penny has made a lifelong and lasting contribution to the study of molecular evolution. His colleague at the Institute of Fundamental Sciences at Massey University, Professor Peter Lockhart, has said, 'David Penny's work is characterised by great curiosity, intuition and a capacity to cross disciplines. In particular he has repeatedly demonstrated an uncanny ability to recognise innovative solutions to problems and to see proofs that mathematicians would eventually discover.'



A graduate of Canterbury University, where he was inspired by noted philosopher of science Karl Popper, David Penny then completed a PhD at Yale University, followed by postdoctoral research at McMaster University, Ontario. In 1966, he joined the staff at Massey University, working within the Department of Plant Biology, the Institute for Molecular BioSciences and the Institute of Fundamental Sciences. From 2002 to 2010 he was co-leader, with Professor Mike Hendy, of the Allan Wilson Centre, hosted at Massey University, which was one of the original New Zealand Centres of Research Excellence. With Professor Hendy, he developed DNA analysis methods to test the theory of evolution, as well as testing numerous other hypotheses to help resolve major controversies of our time, including the human settlement of New Zealand. An indication of the breadth of Professor Penny's research interests is given in a tribute issue for his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of the *New Zealand Science Review* (2009, vol. 66, no. 1), in which collaborators from various research institutions in New Zealand and overseas outline some of his major contributions to their specific fields. In 2005, after 40 years at Massey University, he was named a Distinguished Professor, a title given to only those who have achieved outstanding international eminence in their fields.

The commemorative issue of *New Zealand Science Review* mentioned above also shows that Professor Penny has been very active in science policy, largely through the New Zealand Association of Scientists, in which he was a Council Member for many years and President from 1989 to 1991. He published major contributions about the economic value of R&D and the vital need for research in *New Zealand Science Review* and elsewhere. He was awarded the Association's Marsden Medal in 2000 in recognition of his outstanding service to science and the profession of science, and was made an honorary life member of the Association in 2013.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand and, in 2004, was awarded the Rutherford Medal in recognition of his distinguished contributions in theoretical biology, molecular evolution, and the analysis of DNA information. In 2006, he was made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to science.

David Penny retired in 2017 and was made a Professor Emeritus, but colleagues say he retired in name only. Last year he released another book, *Evolution Now*, in which he gave a view of modern evolutionary theory from a Popperian perspective. The book dissects the chronology of evolutionary study starting from the 1600s through to Darwinism.

(Adapted from a Massey University press release)