



New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists

2012 AGM Minutes New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists

The Annual General Meeting of the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists Inc. was held at The Adelaide Convention Centre, Adelaide, South Australia, at 6:05 pm on Wednesday 25th September 2012.

1. Brian Jordan welcomed the 17 members present at the meeting (Matthew Turnbull, Philippa Barrell, Kate Calcott, Lei Wang, Michelle Gatehouse, Rebecca Bloomer, Jared Fudge, Paul Petrie, Wouter Ballizany, David Chagné, Kathy Schwinn, Jun Zhou, Ranjith Pathirana, John Harris, David Whitehead, Marian McKenzie and Brian Jordan).

Apologies were presented for Andrew Clarke, Paula Jameson, Colin Eady, Ignatius Menzies, Cate Macinnis-Ng, Nick Gould, Kevin Gould, David Collings, Tina Summerfield, Mike Clearwater, and Rainer Hoffman.

2. The **minutes** of the 2011 AGM were accepted (**moved**: Brian Jordan, **seconded** Matthew Turnbull, carried).

3. **Matters arising** from 2011 AGM minutes

Brian reported on the actions taken this year regarding the lack of funding for Post-doctoral fellowships in New Zealand (this was raised for particular attention at the 2010 AGM). He outlined the meeting held with MSI (details in the 2012 **Presidents Report**); in summary it was a fruitful meeting and the message of concern from NZSPB members was clearly passed on and received by MSI. However, it is unclear that anything has progressed since that meeting, particularly considering the recent formation of the new Ministry, MBIE.

4. **President's report.**

Brian Jordan summarised the **President's Report** playing particular attention to two areas. The first being his concern over the career pathway for up and coming Plant Scientists, particularly with reference to raising the bar in terms of student knowledge of plant biology, the poor current support for post-doctoral funding, and the lack of a clear pathway for post-doctoral scientists. The second area Brian highlighted was that of NZSPB profile particularly considering the importance of plants to NZ. He highlighted a need to increase NZSPB profile not only to the science community but also in terms of governmental awareness. Brian asked all members to please feed back any thoughts to him on these particular subjects.

General discussion from the members present followed. David Chagné agreed that very few Rutherford Scholarships were available; Brian Jordan added that only two AGMARDT post-docs were available and that he felt more post-doctoral fellowships were required to make a clear career path for New Zealand's emerging scientists. Rebecca Bloomer commented that having applications for post-doctoral fellowships at

only one time of the year, and in the middle of each year, meant that there was a long time for potential applicants to wait and suggested multiple application times might ease this.

David Whitehead said that in the past many post-docs were conducted at CRIs and there should be increased co-ordination with the CRIs and increased awareness by university staff that CRIs could be an option for post-docs, and to make students aware of this. David Chagné agreed and said that perhaps joint post-doctoral appointments could be made between Universities and CRIs.

Matthew Turnbull suggested that industry-based organisations could also provide financial input. Paul Petrie said that the wine industry currently needs students with the skills that will fit with what their industry needs. Matthew Turnbull suggested that perhaps interested students should be targeted toward industry from an earlier stage and that cadetships could be involved to assist them.

John Harris said that from his point of view as a student it would have been helpful to have a clear career path plan ahead. David Whitehead said that employees consider the people skills of graduates to be almost as important as their academic skills, including communication skills and flexibility as well as writing skills. Kate Calcott said that a focus purely on exam results won't necessarily single out the best people in respect to these skills.

Jared Fudge suggested increased marketing and communication of plant biology to undergraduates would help to increase the profile of the discipline in NZ. Lei Wang added that technicians and research associates could also be exposed more to industry groups/conferences to assist in their career development.

There was general agreement by the group that increasing the profile of plant biology in NZ could be achieved by further assistance at all stages along the career path.

5. Treasurer's Report

Marian McKenzie presented the **Treasurer's report** on behalf of Tina Summerfield who was unable to attend the conference. She highlighted the differences in income between this year and last year, but explained that this was due in large part to conference surpluses in 2011. These can be quite irregular over the years depending on the size of conference profits. She also noted that the society had received a generous gift of \$2000 from the organisers of the Ethylene conference in 2012 and that this would show in next year's financial statement. There were a number of students who had received assistance from the society in the past year to attend conferences and Marian reiterated this was something the society was committed to.

Matthew Turnbull asked if it was expected that ComBio2012 would return a surplus, Marian replied she wasn't sure but would hope so and would check. There were no further comments or questions about the Treasurer's report.

Matthew Turnbull moved that the President's Report be accepted, seconded **Paul Petrie**, carried.

Philippa Barrell moved that the Treasurer's report be accepted, seconded **Kate Calcott**,

carried.

6. Society publicity and attracting new members

Marian McKenzie re-iterated the general agreement by members that increased publicity for the Society was important. She said that to help achieve this one of our members had suggested the Society have a Publicity Officer on the council following the previous AGM. The role of this officer would be to focus on increasing awareness of NZSPB in New Zealand's plant biology community. Cate Macinnis-Ng of Auckland University has expressed an interest in taking up this position.

A general discussion followed including suggestions by members about how to achieve greater awareness of the Society. Paul Petrie suggested members tapping into their current networks. David Whitehead asked if the Publicity Officer role would extend to political publicity and suggested this should be handled by the President of the Society, Brian Jordan agreed. David Chagné and Matthew Turnbull suggested that small regional meetings could be approached regarding sponsorship by the Society to increase our profile, and Marian reminded members that they are able to apply to the Society for money to assist moving visiting international speakers around within New Zealand.

Matthew Turnbull moved that a Publicity Officer role be included on the NZSPB council, seconded **Kate Calcott**, carried.

7. **Election of officers.** **Marian McKenzie** declared all positions vacant and nominations opened. She outlined those standing for council in 2012 (President, Brian Jordan; Vice-President, Rainer Hofmann; Immediate Past President, Mike Clearwater; Secretary, Marian McKenzie; Treasurer, Tina Summerfield; Nick Gould, David Collings, Philippa Barrell and Cate Macinnis-Ng (Council). There were no further nominations.

Jared Fudge nominated all the people standing, seconded **Kathy Schwinn**, carried unanimously.

The officers were declared elected, with thanks. Brian thanked Kevin Gould, who had decided to step down from council, for his valuable input over the past four years.

8. Conference Venues, 2013 and beyond

2013

Brian Jordan outlined plans for a joint meeting with NZIAHS in Palmerston North next year and that progress towards this meeting was summarised in his **President's Report**. He encouraged members to become involved and to contact him if they were interested in assisting with the meeting.

Marian McKenzie said that many of our members have also indicated we should have a regular attendance at Queenstown Molecular Biology Research Week, she reported that a Plant Satellite was being planned for 2013. She suggested perhaps NZSPB could sponsor a QMB symposium, and that this, along with the Society's annual meeting with NZIAHS in Palmerston North would serve a broad range of our members. Members present were in agreement that this should also be pursued.

Matthew Turnbull suggested a workshop/discussion be included at the Society's annual meeting to make some further progress on the career path issues for students/postdocs identified earlier in the meeting.

9. Future ComBio Arrangements

Brian Jordan outlined our current arrangement with ComBio organizers, which is that we combine our annual meeting with ComBio in Australia every three years and every nine years the meeting is held in New Zealand. Members present agreed that this was a good arrangement for the Society and that it should be continued.

Matthew Turnbull moved that we should continue with this arrangement, **Philippa Barrell** seconded, carried.

10. Roger Slack Award.

Brian Jordan reminded members that nominations for next year's Roger Slack Award are now open to all members, that members should start considering potential nominees now and that they could approach him or Marian McKenzie with nominations.

11. Annals of Botany Speaker.

Brian Jordan reminded members that the Annals of Botany sponsors an international speaker nominated by the Society to talk at our annual conference. This year the Annals of Botany speaker had been shared between our Society and Australian Society of Plant Biologists. He encouraged members to consider suitable speakers for next year's conference and to nominate them early.

12. Award Medal Up-date

Marian McKenzie reported there had been a suggestion that the Society upgrade our current Roger Slack medal and that perhaps we should consider getting a medal made rather than customizing a standard model as we currently do. She had investigated two companies, and had received one verbal estimate of \$500-\$1000 for the initial set up. Past awardees present, Matthew Turnbull and David Chagné, said that they had been happy with the quality of the medal they'd received and that it was receiving the award itself that was important, that the medal was just a symbol of that. In further discussion members agreed that a medal was preferable over a trophy. Kate Calcott suggested if we were to go ahead with getting a medal made for the award that we could solicit ideas on the medal design from members, perhaps running a competition as we had done when we changed the NZSPB logo.

13. Any other business

Lei Wang suggested that the Society consider supporting technical/research associate staff in a similar way to the support that students currently receive. She said that it was unclear what benefits technical/research associate staff gained from being members of the Society, and that a travel or study award aimed at this group would encourage further membership. There was general agreement that this would be a good initiative to consider, particularly in the context of supporting the career development of the Societies members. David Whitehead suggested that a session at our annual meeting could be devoted to the technical aspects of the job.

John Harris raised the concern that some supervisors of students applying for travel awards were not members of the Society themselves, and that perhaps this requirement needs to be explicitly stated as part of a student application. Marian said that wherever she was aware of this occurring supervisors were politely asked to join the Society.

Brian Jordan thanked all the members for attending and closed the meeting at 7:10pm.