



New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists

## 2013 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 AgHort Lecture Complex, Massey University, Palmerston North, at 4:30 pm on Tuesday 2nd July 2013.

1. Brian Jordan welcomed the 27 members present at the meeting (David Lewis, Ranjith Pathirana, Kate Calcott, Lei Wang, Erin O'Donoghue, Julian Heyes, Hanh Ngo, Richard Macknight, Nick Albert, Jason Wargent, Rainer Hofmann, Kathy Schwinn, Jun Zhou, Julia Raynes, Diantha Smith, Jessica Roche, Susanna Leung, Srishti Joshi, Shirley Nichols, Jim Crush, Kevin Davies, Ronan Chen, Phillip West, David Brummell, Mike Clearwater, Marian McKenzie and Brian Jordan).

Apologies were presented for Andrew Clarke, Paula Jameson, Cate Macinnis-Ng, Nick Gould, David Whitehead, David Collings, Philippa Barrell, Tina Summerfield, Rebecca Bloomer, and Michael McManus.

2. The **minutes** of the 2012 AGM were accepted (**moved**: Kathy Schwinn, **seconded** Lei Wang, carried).

3. **Matters arising** from 2012 AGM minutes

Brian Jordan noted that many of the issues discussed at the 2011 AGM would be raised in the latter part of the meeting. There were no further matters arising from members.

4. **President's report.**

**Brian Jordan** summarised the **President's Report**, beginning with the issue of career pathways for PostDocs in NZ. He noted the level of concern over this issue from members during the 2012 AGM and summarised what he had done on behalf of the society regarding this since (details in the **President's Report**). He asked for further comment from members.

**Kevin Davies** noted that the National Science Challenges could be an opportunity to lobby for using some of that money specifically for PostDocs.

**Brian Jordan** said that the money coming from the PBRF system should be used to drive further research and could be used for PostDocs, but this doesn't necessarily appear to be what happens.

**Nick Albert** suggested that overheads for PostDocs could be reduced, or PhD overheads increased, to make these positions more financially equivalent. **Brian Jordan** answered that there was resistance to this idea from the Universities. **Kevin Davies** noted that Plant & Food Research doesn't charge overheads on PostDocs.

**Julian Heyes** said that internationally there was a shortage of plant scientists and it was increasingly difficult to get them to come to NZ. **Brian Jordan** noted there was an underpinning issue of publicity in the plant science area. **Jessica Roche** suggested combining plant biology and plant biotechnology as a society may increase perception of this area. **Brian Jordan** felt that biotechnology is a tool, but that there is a clear need for a strong knowledge base in the areas of plant biology and physiology. **Richard Macknight** asked if we had demographic data on the numbers of PhD students coming through plant science and that considering the demographics of certain groups of plant biologists e.g. plant breeders there may be a large gap emerging.

**Rainer Hoffman** asked where the money from PBRF goes, and whether we could lobby government directly to make sure this money goes back into research/PostDocs. **Brian Jordan** said he would raise this. **Jason Wargent** clarified that the issue of retaining PBRF money in research may not be across all universities, though he agreed there was a big problem getting money for PostDocs in NZ. **Julian Heyes** suggested a joint letter from a number of NZ scientific societies could be written to the universities saying there was general societal concern regarding the use of PBRF money.

**Phillip West** asked if NZ science societies could combine funding and conduct some research to get a snapshot of numbers of PhDs/PostDocs across the sciences to determine what was going on. **Brian Jordan** said that the Royal Society seemed to already have that information, yet it didn't seem to make a difference. **Erin O'Donoghue** suggested that as 'economic impact' was a current buzz phrase, perhaps if we made a case in terms of potential economic impact on the country it may be more likely to be noticed. **Julian Heyes** said the Coriolis Report may have that kind of information in it.

#### 5. Treasurer's Report

**Marian McKenzie** presented the **Treasurer's report** on behalf of **Tina Summerfield** who was unable to attend the conference. She noted the increase in income relative to last year, but explained that this was due in large part to a generous gift of \$5000 from the organisers of the Ethylene conference in 2012, which was to be targeted toward assisting students. Total expenditure last year was dominated by \$5000 spent on student travel awards and prizes, the students receiving these were listed in the Treasurer's report. The society's current total balance is similar to last year's. **Marian McKenzie** noted that **Tina Summerfield** had suggested we move some of our funds into a longer term saving account with higher interest rates and asked members for their agreement.

**Richard Macknight** asked if we expected to spend some of the surplus money rather than leaving it in the bank. **Marian McKenzie** responded that the money was seen to some extent as a buffer as we could not guarantee that every conference the society was part of would return a profit, and that this was very difficult to predict. She re-iterated that one of the major aims of the society was to provide financial support for the students and that we expected to continue doing so in the coming year. **Rainer Hoffman** said he supported the transfer of \$10,000-\$14,000 into a longer term savings account. **Brian Jordan** and **Richard Macknight** agreed.

**Nick Albert** moved that the President's Report be accepted, seconded **Richard Macknight**, carried.

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

**Clearwater**, carried.

- 6. Election of officers.** **Marian McKenzie** declared all positions vacant and nominations opened. She outlined those standing for council in 2013 (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.

**Kate Calcott** nominated all the people standing, seconded **Mike Clearwater**, carried unanimously. The officers were declared elected.

## **7. Conference Venues, 2014 and beyond**

**Brian Jordan** said that in 2014 many of our members would be expected to attend the Hort Congress, to be held in Brisbane. The society could also consider a satellite meeting at Queenstown Molecular Biology week as this approach had been popular with many members in 2010.

**Jason Wargent** suggested NZSPB could have a stand in the exhibition hall at HortCongress to promote the society. **David Lewis** suggested sponsorship of a morning/afternoon tea or of a conference session may be more appropriate, with the cost of each being about \$2,000-\$3,000. Another option could be for there to be a “NZ floor space” in the exhibition hall where society banners could be included. He agreed to talk to the HortCongress organising committee regarding this.

**Richard Macknight** said there had been some talk about a Plant Satellite meeting at QMB next year. He suggested we could time it to run immediately before or after the HortCongress and leverage international speakers who were already here. **Brian Jordan** suggested we could approach the Annals of Botany for assisting funding for this. He asked members to consider and make suggestions of suitable people. **Nick Albert** mentioned that being involved in a Plant Satellite meeting at QMB was a good chance to link with other NZ plant scientists who don't usually come to NZSPB meetings.

## **8. Publicity and attracting new members**

**Brian** summarised the comments made in the President's report regarding this and talked about the efforts that **Philippa Barrell**, **Mike Clearwater** and **Cate Macinnis-Ng** had put into the website and society publicity. He mentioned **Cate's** interest in surveying members regarding what they would like from the society, and her concern that particularly plant researchers and the University of Auckland were not generally members.

**Jim Crush** motioned that there was also a lack of members from the Agricultural sector, which could be targeted. **Rainer Hoffman** asked if a joint meeting between the NZ Grassland Association and NZSPB would work. Agreement that it might, but need to find out whom to ask (could start with Prof Jacqueline Rowarth, Waikato University).

**Richard Macknight** suggested we construct a letter of invitation outlining the advantages of being a member to send to those plant scientists who were not currently members.

**Kevin Davies** said that membership payment on-line via the website would make a big difference. **Mike Clearwater** said this could be set up for credit cards relatively easily, but setting up direct credits from accounts would be much more expensive. General agreement that setting up at least credit card payments on line should be pursued.

**Jason Wargent** suggested NZSPB could sponsor speakers at local meetings eg. the monthly Plant Biology meeting held in Palmerston North. **Kevin Davies** agreed and suggested we include a society slide outlining the benefits of being a member to go up before the sponsored speaker.

**Marzieh Keshavarzi** said that as an international student she originally didn't know anything about the society when she arrived and suggested an annual invitation is made to university departments letting them know about the society and the advantages for their students. **Nick Albert** suggested we could ask all members of the society who had their own web page to consider including an NZSPB logo, particularly if the society had supported their students/lab members through travel awards etc.

#### 9. **Global Plant Council membership**

**Brian Jordan** summarised the Global Plant Council; an international conglomeration of Plant Biology Scientists with common goals in terms of plant biology, and asked for member's opinions regarding our society's involvement with this kind of global network.

**Richard Macknight** said that he knew the current chairperson and sees this as an opportunity to be more connected internationally as a society. He confirmed that credible people were promoting the Global Plant Council.

**Julian Heyes** expressed concern about several past such groups often not continuing for long and suggested looking into what other groups exist.

**Brian Jordan** said that society members had been asked to be actively involved, including attending annual meetings of the Global Plant Science Council. **Mike Clearwater** said he didn't think we should spend society money sending someone solely for this purpose, but if members were going to an associated conference they could be asked to attend on the society's behalf.

**Mike Clearwater** also noted that Global Fascination of Plants Day was a more local event we could get involved in as a society – Mike Pearson had organised events around this. **Jessica Roche** agreed this would have good promotion opportunities, especially if we joined with other societies.

#### 10. **Technician Award**

**Marian McKenzie** summarised the suggestion made at the last AGM that the society establishes an award for technical staff who are members, and that this was something that members had been generally enthusiastic about at the time, but that it hadn't been established yet.

There was general agreement that this would be a good award to establish. **Richard Macknight** suggested it be similar in style to the student awards. **Phillip West** suggested it be extended beyond just supporting conference attendance to include support for training courses to offer an opportunity for technical staff to extend their career path.

**Julian Heyes** suggested it should be named the “Technicians Career Development Award”. **Brian Jordan** confirmed that the award would be implemented by council this year.

### **11. Roger Slack Award**

Brian Jordan summarised the award and acknowledged Richard Macknight as the winner of the award this year. Members congratulated him with a round of applause.

### **12. Annals of Botany Lecture 2014.**

Brian Jordan reminded members that the Annals of Botany sponsors an international speaker nominated by the Society to talk at our annual conference and encouraged members to consider suitable speakers for next year’s conference and to nominate them early.

### **13. Any other business**

Society web page:

**Suzanna Leung** suggested a blog or discussion forum could be included on our webpage. This could be for members to discuss current events important to plant biology and/or for members to post technical issues in order to get ideas/support from other members. **Marian McKenzie** said there was a page on the website for forum-style discussions, but **Mike Clearwater** said it was not working yet and that the web design people would be required to establish this. **Brian Jordan** said that we should pay to get it working. There was general agreement.

Brian Jordan thanked all the members for attending and closed the meeting at 5:45pm.  
Minutes taken by Marian McKenzie