



Annual Reports 1998

President's Report

Upon reflection, the past year seems to have been largely “business as usual” for the NZSPP. Membership has remained static at around 140, probably a reflection of the static level of funding available to plant research in New Zealand. We can take encouragement from the healthy number of postgraduate student members who have joined the Society recently, particularly from Massey and Lincoln Universities. This can be attributed largely to the enthusiasm of certain academic staff members at these Universities, who have been instrumental in raising the profile of the Society and of Plant Physiology in general. This year the NZSPP was pleased to assist ten students to present their research at overseas conferences (six of them joining us here in Adelaide), at a total cost of \$3000 - no mean feat for a small society.

The NZSPP has attempted to keep up with technological developments, particularly in information technology which in the past two years has revolutionised the accessibility and searchability of scientific literature. It is very easy to fall behind the play in this area, and to be missing out without knowing it. I hope that our web site Useful Links and Tips and Tricks sections and recent newsletter articles on subjects such as the availability on-line of full text versions of certain plant physiology journals have proved helpful to some members. I expect our web site to become an increasingly important focal point for the Society. It is currently rather austere, but nonetheless functional and simple to maintain. The latter was important since I had to glean most of my skills as “web-master” from on-line tutorials. There is plenty of scope for improvements by someone with more HTML knowledge and time than I have had available. We must not forget however that computers are supposed to save us time, so unnecessary complexity should be avoided. Our switch away from hard-copied newsletters and notices in favour of e-mail alerts of our latest web site additions has saved us money, and, more importantly, lots of our Secretary's time and energy, which used to be spent entering and formatting text, printing, stapling, addressing, stamping and posting.

Of the 500+ e-mail messages related to NZSPP business which I received since becoming President in August 1996, the vast majority have something to do with a conference. Conference Planning seems to be consistently the major focus of NZSPP Council's attention. This year we had less involvement in programme planning for Adelaide than might have been expected. We were not asked to assist with programme issues, apart from participating in the selection of Reinhart Ceulemans to present this year's Annals of Botany Lecture. I understand that a number of our members have been disgruntled by being asked to present their research as a poster rather than an oral presentation at this conference. By the time the full extent of this became evident (when I discovered that in fact only one of our members had been allocated an oral presentation slot), the programme was too firmly consolidated for my complaints to conference organisers on your behalf to have any effect. I was told that news of NZSPP's involvement had only surfaced after much of the planning had been done. I

should point out that NZSPP requested to join in this conference in early April 1997. This was welcomed by the ASPP President in his response in May 1997. In retrospect, we should have pursued his offer at that time to supply e-mail addresses of convenors of the five programme groups. This may have led to opportunities to contribute to some of the programme planning.

The need to begin programme planning several years in advance is becoming increasingly apparent, particularly for big meetings involving large overseas societies. Our joint meeting with ASPP, NZSBMB and ASBMB planned for December 2000 in Wellington is already occupying a good deal of our attention. The likely prospect of our involvement in hosting an even larger meeting one or two years later involving more than 1000 delegates from the American Society of Plant Physiologists is challenging, to say the least. So the next few years will certainly not be “business as usual”.

In May of this year we received a letter from the President of the NZ Institute of Agricultural Science suggesting that all groups with an interest in land management and primary production link together under a professional body, to be known as the NZ Primary Production Association. Each society would have representation on the board of this “overarching” body but would also continue to function as now. Such a body, representing a large number of people, would “allow a unified and heavy-weight voice to be heard in Wellington”. A capitation fee would be required to support the secretariat/treasurer, but this could be offset to some extent by discontinuing payment of capitation fees to the Royal Society.

The response of your Council to this suggestion was basically negative. We said that we are satisfied with and grateful for the representation and services which the Royal Society provides. The Royal Society has proved an appropriate and helpful lobby group, and an accepted and effective umbrella organisation that is clearly moving with the times (their Internet Gateway to NZ Science and weekly e-mail Science Alert service being good examples). In addition, we pointed out that the NZSPP is a science-based rather than an industry-based society. For these reasons we felt it inappropriate for the NZSPP to be included in the proposed new grouping of societies in a New Zealand Primary Production Association.

I have enjoyed my tenure as President, and thank you all for your support. In particular I should acknowledge the seemingly tireless and ever-dependable efforts of our Secretary/Treasurer Julian Heyes. Over the past year I have attempted to find ways to reduce the share of the administrative load which Julian has been bearing. We may need to further hone down our expectations of the Secretary/Treasurer if we are to expect anyone else to want to take over the position when Julian decides to stand down.

I wish my successor Gavin Ross well. I am confident that he will prove a worthy and capable leader of the Society as we work through the considerable organisational challenges which the next few years hold in store.

Keith Sharrock
September 1998

Treasurer's Report

The Society's membership at the end of the financial year remained stable at 145. Our accounts show very little net change over the year, but this situation has already changed since the end of the financial year. Keith has referred to our generous student sponsorship and Council has approved a donation of \$500 towards the cost of a Seed Symposium to be held at Massey University in December this year. These activities are precisely what I believe we exist for as a Society. Nevertheless, they come at a price, at a time when our income is down. Last year the Lincoln conference did not return a profit; this year, we are meeting with ASPP and have no share in any profit or loss from this meeting. Next year we are meeting with NZIAS/SHS in Auckland, but if there is a profit, our share is likely to be small again, with increasing use being made of professional conference organisers. Historically our share of conference surpluses has allowed us to build up some reserves. Now, our regular commitments to student travel alone are roughly equal to our budgeted income from subscriptions. I would forecast around a \$2000 reduction in our assets by the next AGM, which will lead to a further reduction in income from interest.

For that reason, despite a break-even year to March 1998, I would strongly recommend that we make a modest increase in fees to \$20 for full members, and \$7 for associate members (students and retired members). Our last fee increase for full members was agreed to in 1989, effective from 1 January 1990. Associate member fees have been at \$5 since 1982! This increase is intended to slow our steady decline without losing disaffected members. Each year new factors affect our bottom line. We hope that the Annals of Botany will again offer funding for us to bring in a keynote speaker in 1999; and we have the combined conference in the year 2000 to plan for after that. Depending on the outcome of those events, we may need to reconsider either our level of payments or our subscriptions again soon.

You may recall that I had not supplied our auditor with the accounts in time for last year's AGM. This year, I was more on the ball. Our accounts have again been audited free of charge by Fluker, Denton & Co, Levin, as they have done since 1993. I expect to stand down as Secretary/Treasurer at the next AGM, and have promised the auditors that next year will be the last time I twist their arm for a free audit.

Julian Heyes

Treasurer, NZSPP