



Annual Reports 2002

President's Report

It gives me much pleasure to present my second report as President to the AGM of the New Zealand Society of Plant Physiologists.

To begin with, on behalf of our Society, I would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to meet this year with the New Zealand Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (NZSBMB), and the New Zealand Microbiological Society (NZMS). This joint meeting with NZSBMB follows a very successful Combio meeting in Wellington in December, 2000, and meeting with NZMS has created the opportunity for some interesting scientific sessions on the theme of plant-microbe interactions. For our presence at this conference, I would like to thank our regional representative Tony Conner. I think most would agree that the conference has been well organised, and as far as the NZSPP Council is concerned, there has been relatively little for us to do.

Since our last AGM, NZSPP has continued to flourish. Membership has remained healthy and, as you will see when the accounts are presented, we now have a considerable financial reserve. In terms of tracking our new membership applications, it is clear that conferences such as Combio2000 were very successful in securing new members for our Society. At the AGM last year, I proposed the idea of a three-year cycle of meeting partners. This year, we are meeting with NZSBMB, and next year we are to meet jointly with our Australian counterparts in Melbourne, the Australian Society of Plant Biologists. You should note that the Biochemical Societies are also meeting there then, and so we have Combio2003. I hope everyone here can and will support that meeting. For 2004, to complete our three-year cycle, we can meet with the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural Science and the New Zealand Society for Horticultural Science. This group, with other allied societies, has been our traditional meeting partners, and I think many would support meeting with them again.

Shortly, at this AGM we will be voting for our executive and Council. In this report, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of two members who have indicated that they will not be standing for re-election. The first is Gavin Ross, who has served as a Council member and president of the Society. Gavin has brought a high degree of professionalism to his role in the Society executive and his contribution is greatly appreciated. The second person is Jocelyn Eason, our out-going secretary/treasurer. Jocelyn took over the role in 1999, and has eased the Society into the electronic age. She is always highly organised and has carried out her duties with a great degree of competence and care. For all our conferences, including this one, Jocelyn has played a very important role in organising our members, including the president, and she hands over an exceedingly well organised Society to her successor.

At this conference, we will be presenting our Outstanding Plant Physiologist award for the second year, and I would like to congratulate our nominee this year, Dr. Andrew Allan. I would also like to welcome our Annals of Botany Lecturer, Dr. Martin McAinsh. I hope that his visit to New Zealand is a rewarding one. Finally we will also present two Life

Memberships at this conference. In the past, our Society has been slow to bestow such honours, but I think this is now improving.

To the national scene, I would like first to express my regret at the loss, due to funding decisions, of Peter Minchin and Michael Thorpe from the professional scientific community in New Zealand. I mention Peter and Michael because they were our inaugural winners of the Outstanding Plant Physiologist award, but there are others members of our Society who either have had their positions disestablished, or accepted voluntary severance.

The main driver of the situation this year were the large fluctuations in FRST allocations to CRIs, and the decisions taken by the CRIs as to how to manage the subsequent funding changes. To NZSPP, it appeared that many of our members were being affected and so letters of protest were sent to the CEO of HortResearch (the CRI in which many of our affected members were employed), and eventually to the Minister of Science, Mr Peter Hodgson. Needless to say, expressions of concern were received in reply, but with no change to the status quo. However, I would like to thank our members, including some student members of the Society who did help us to communicate our frustration with many aspects of the current funding system in New Zealand to the minister. A major point made was that such funding allocations make it difficult to envisage a stable career path in science in New Zealand.

As a University employee in plant biology, I would also like to record my concern at the erosion of teaching of the subject at the tertiary (University) level. There are now only a few Universities in New Zealand with any sort of capacity to mount a credible degree in Plant Biology. Classes in plant biology, particularly at senior level, have always been small, but the current EFTS-based funding system is forcing the cessation of such courses. New Zealand needs only a few plant taxonomists or plant breeders, for example, to be trained each year, but it does need some.

What is common to both situations is that the maintenance of a credible scientific capability in New Zealand appears to be running second to economic expediency. However, we have all read recently that the cost of imported flour is to increase due to drought conditions in Australia, and that the cost of some fruit and vegetables in New Zealand is predicted to rise because of the unusually cool spring (with the attendant flow-on effects). It is easy to envisage how a strong research capacity in environmental plant physiology will be important to combat such effects on primary production in the future, providing that one still remains in New Zealand.

At the last NZSPP conference I was asked to draft some guidelines for the adoption of a President's Symposium at an NZSPP conference every year (or at the discretion of the President). The purpose of the Symposium is to provide the president of NZSPP with the discretion to ensure that either a newly-emerging or currently dynamic research field of plant physiology of relevance to the membership of NZSPP is 'show-cased' at a NZSPP-sponsored conference. I have appended some draft guidelines to this report, which, if accepted by this AGM, I believe are sufficient to serve as a guiding document for incoming presidents.

Finally, as this will be my last AGM as President, I would like to thank the Council and NZSPP members for their support over the last two years.

Michael McManus
President, NZSPP
22nd November, 2002

Treasurer's Report 2002

The statement of receipts and payments for the year ended 31 March 2002 is available as hard copy.

We currently have 153 members on our books (117 Full Members, 31 Associate Members and 5 Life Members).

Total income in this financial year is greater than last year by \$ 6,565 which is due to the profit share we received from Combio2000. Our income from subscriptions is lower than last year, mainly due to the catch-up nature of 2001 where subscriptions in arrears were paid by those members wishing to attend Combio2000.

Total expenses for the current financial year are down on the previous year by \$ 5,175, although this is largely due to this years annual conference occurring at the end of the, with expenses for the current Annals of Botany speaker and Outstanding Plant Physiologists Award coming in the next financial year. In addition, travel and registration expenses for the Inaugural Outstanding Plant Physiologists Award were not taken, the recipients (Peter Minchin and Michael Thorpe) asking that we use the monies for assisting students to conferences.

Student subsidies were down for the current financial year, as the Lincoln conference drew less students than the previous large Combio2000. We made awards of \$100 for Best Poster (Jianmin Guo) and Best Oral paper (Maria Castle). In addition, we made two International Travel Awards of \$250 each earlier in the year. The International Travel Awards were made to William Nicoll who attended 27th Meeting of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies in Lisbon, Portugal, in June, and Tina Summerfield who attended XXVith International Horticultural Congress held in Toronto, Canada in August of 2002.

We have a healthy end of year bank balance (\$12,000 of which has since been transferred to our BNZ Achiever Saver Account), and although expenses for the current conference are still to be met (Annals of Botany ca. \$5000, student subsidies ca. \$1000), we will have reserve funds to assist students to the Melbourne conference next year.

Our accounts have been audited free of charge by AuditLink (Naylor Lawrence & Gray, in association with PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Palmerston North).

Jocelyn Eason