



## Annual Reports 2006

### President's Report

This is the 28th annual meeting of NZSPP as an incorporated society, and this is my second (and last!) report as President.

It is a great pleasure for our Society to be meeting once again with our colleagues from both New Zealand and Australia at ComBio 2006 in Brisbane. This will be the 5th time we have been involved in ComBio (following 1995, 1998 and 2003 in Australia and 2000 in New Zealand). Meeting at a ComBio conference provides us with wonderful opportunities to hear from some of the best people in their fields. This year we have supported seven students to attend this meeting – this is a very important part of our brief and it is pleasing to see healthy numbers of student presentations at the conference (and four at other overseas meetings) this year. We also welcome Professor Steve Long, of the University of Illinois, as our 2006 Annals of Botany Speaker.

#### **Name change**

This year we have been giving serious consideration to the possibility of changing the name of the Society to one that better reflects the breadth of activities our members. Although my thoughts regarding the rationale for such a change were circulated during the year, I include a brief summary here in my President's report for the purposes of completeness.

#### *Rationale*

In recent years I have been concerned that the term “plant physiology” may be restricting the members that our society might attract or the impact and influence that the Society might have in the wider community. Although I regard myself as a plant physiologist, I am aware that some of our current members probably do not. Importantly, I get the impression that the meaning of the term is becoming less clear to our younger scientists (some currently our members, others who might consider being).

Plant biology has changed significantly over the last few decades. When NZSPP was founded in the late 1970s the boundaries between biochemistry, genetics, physiology and ecology were much more distinct than they are now. The discipline of molecular genetics was emerging and the term molecular biology not yet in heavy usage. Over the intervening period the boundaries between physiology and molecular biology have disappeared. Now many researchers (although I am not one of them!) use molecular techniques in physiology and physiological ecology. It is becoming increasingly clear that the reverse is also true – the work of the molecular biologist can become rather hollow without a full appreciation of the whole plant functional context.

It is certain that those of us interested in the function of plants will continue to incorporate new approaches into our research. Multi-disciplinary approaches will be pivotal to the role

our members play in society. If an integrated approach is essential to further our understanding of plant biology, then I think that the name of our society should reflect this approach – i.e. the name should break down existing barriers between our sub-disciplines and attempt to embrace them all.

Whilst I am very confident about the role of the “traditional” plant physiologist (the functional plant biologist) in modern plant science, in my view this role is better defined now in the context of a broader definition of plant biology. As a result, I think that is time for us to consider a name for the Society that better reflects the breadth of activities our members – both present and future.

There are a number of societies around the world fulfilling a similar role to ours – some (but not all) have in recent times made the decision to change their names away from those using “Plant Physiology”. These are:

- American Society of Plant Biologists
- Australian Society of Plant Scientists
- The Federation of European Societies of Plant Biology

#### *Support for a name change*

Our efforts to determine the level of support for a name change have taken the form of both email consultation and a formal postal ballot. We had 101 voting papers returned of a total of 150 sent out (67%). The results of the ballot indicated very strong support for a name change, and a preference for the name to change to the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists.

In favour of a name change for the New Zealand Society of Plant Physiologists - 81 votes  
Opposed to a name change for the New Zealand Society of Plant Physiologists - 15 votes

#### *Preference for name*

New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists - 49 votes  
New Zealand Society of Plant Science - 40 votes  
Neither Name - 5 votes

Based on this voting, I am recommending that the AGM confirm the Society’s name change to the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists.

#### **Development of the Society**

The new name for the Society presents us with opportunities to develop and grow the role that we play in New Zealand and Australasian science. I would be very grateful for suggestions about how might go about this. Some suggestions which we might discuss at the AGM include:

- \* Activities to promote the new name
- \* Activities to market the Society to potential new members
- \* Activities to promote the role of the Society in New Zealand science

#### **Plants in Action Textbook**

Members will remember that in my report last year I announced the intention of the Society to support (both financially and in the preparation of content) the planned 2nd edition of "our" Australasian textbook, Plants in Action. Paula Jameson is our major link with the

project, and she reports that, although progress has been a little slow, the coming year should see significant activity. This is an important activity for the society, and we will be doing all we can to make sure that members play a significant role in the preparation of material for the text.

### **Future Meetings**

I can report that planning has already begun for a joint meeting with the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science and the Australian Society of Horticultural Scientists (most probably in Christchurch) in late 2007. I am also looking into the possibility of linking our meeting with that of the NZ Ecological Society – a group with whom many of us have some synergies.

I am sure that the incoming President would very much like to hear from members if they have suggestions for symposium sessions, if they are prepared to chair such sessions and if they have suggestions for overseas speakers who we might nominate as the Annals of Botany Speaker.

I can also confirm that the Society (in partnership with NZSBMB and other societies) will be hosting ComBio in December 2009 at the Christchurch Convention Centre. A founding organising committee has met (with myself and David Palmer NZSBMB as co-convenors) and we are working towards bringing in other relevant societies to make this one of the most significant scientific conferences in NZ for many years. There will be plenty of work for interested members as 2009 approaches.

### **Membership numbers**

NZSPP has a fairly stable membership. Our total membership stands at approximately 152, with over 30 student members. I hope that we can grow these numbers further in coming years following the launch of the new name and a subsequent membership campaign.

### **OP Award**

This year we are pleased to announce Dr Margaret Barbour (Landcare Research) as the 2006 Outstanding Physiologist. Margaret obtained both her BSc and MSc from the University of Waikato, then went on to gain a PhD in Plant Science from the Australian National University. Margaret returned to New Zealand in 2001 to join Landcare Research as a postdoctoral Fellow, and is currently a research scientist in the Global Change Processes Team at Lincoln. Her research interests focus on developing theory and stable isotope techniques to interpret plant carbon-water dynamics at scales from individual leaves to the ecosystem. Margaret's publications in highly rated international journals are widely recognised internationally and she is well respected in the international scientific community. Evidence of this exceptional achievement and respect is clear from the 19 journal articles and book chapters she has published in the last six years, the high number of invited presentations at international conferences and the interest from colleagues in wanting to collaborate with Margaret and include her in proposals to funding agencies in New Zealand, Australia, USA, France, United Kingdom and Israel. Collaboration with colleagues in Australia, USA, France, United Kingdom and Israel confirms her works is at the leading edge of international research.

Margaret is a very worthy recipient of our award, and significantly the first woman to receive this honour. Unfortunately she is unable to be at our annual meeting as she is currently on parental leave expecting her second child. She has clearly been productive in ways other than scientific (!) and we wish her well for the future.

### **Funding of basic plant science**

Although this year is not the first time this issue has been raised, a number of members have brought to my attention their concerns at the disappointing success rate for plant-based proposals to the Marsden Fund. Given the obvious significance of plant research to NZ, this should be of concern to us all and the society.

I am currently awaiting feedback from the Marsden Fund on precise statistics on success rates for application listing some aspect of plant biology as the focus. It is important that we consider the reasons for this apparent lack of traction amongst plant-base proposals in the context of actual data on success rates.

I would be grateful for further discussion on this issue, and particularly suggestions on how to improve future success. One solution that has been suggested is for the society to lobby for the inclusion of plant researchers on panels like the Ecology, Evolution and Behaviour (EEB) and Cell, Molecular and Physiology (CMP) panels. This is worth discussing, but we should remember that there is no formal process for nominating potential panel members.

### **Summary**

On behalf of all our members I should like to acknowledge the constant support of the council and, in particular, Mike Clearwater, who has successfully (!) completed his 4th year as our Secretary and Treasurer. Mike has done a wonderful job this year, particularly in coordinating the ballot on the name change. He has kindly agreed to stay on in the position, a decision that I am sure the incoming President will be happy with.

I have enjoyed my two-year stint as president - I think we are well placed to launch into the next year as I pass the role on to Julian Eaton-Rye.

Matthew Turnbull  
President, NZSPP  
September 2006

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## Treasurer's Report 2006

The statement of receipts and payments for the year ended 31 March 2006 is available as a hard copy.

As of 31 March 2006 we had 166 members on our books (122 Full Members, 37 Associate Members and 7 Life Members), a similar number to last year. Membership on the date of this report (27 September 2006), is around 152. This is a more accurate figure, reflecting greater efforts this year to keep members up-to-date with their subscription fee, and to remove those with whom we have lost contact.

Total income was \$4,484.56 less than last year. Income from subs was down \$300.60, we did not receive a conference surplus this year (last year's surplus was from COMBIO 2003), and after currency conversion the Annals of Botany payment for our guest speaker was \$200.00 less than last year. Income from interest increased by \$544.77, reflecting the maturing of our 18 month PSIS term deposit in the current year.

Total expenses increased for the current financial year by \$3,159.07. The main increases in costs were an extra \$2,586.17 spent on the Annals of Botany Speaker and conference costs, \$300 more on student travel awards, and \$189.87 more on Outstanding Physiologist award costs. Some of the Annals of Botany speaker costs were for late receipts presented by the speaker from the previous years. Costs for all types of award vary each year with the expenses incurred by the recipient (this year the Annals of Botany speaker travelled from the UK), the number of applicants for student awards, and associated expenses incurred by council members (last year costs included presentation of our Outstanding Physiologist award at the Royal Society annual awards dinner in Wellington).

Student subsidies and prizes increased by \$300 to a total of \$4,700 this year. We were happy to provide \$250 each to 12 students (Elizabeth Jaya, Anuradha Sooda, Benjamin Franzamayr, Marissa Roldan, Michelle Williamson, Ludivine Thomas, Nick Albert, Jiancheng Song, Nilangani Pathirana, Yongjin Shang, Mathew Cumming and Andrea Pickering) in support of their attendance and presentations at our annual conference in Lincoln. A further \$1000 was awarded to Tracy Putoczki in support of her presenting her work at the international Boron symposium in Wuhan, China, and at COMBIO 2005 in Adelaide. Hema Nair also received \$500 to support her presentation at COMBIO in Adelaide. Marissa Roldan and Jiancheng Song received \$100 each as prizes for the best poster and best oral presentation, respectively, at our annual conference.

The overall result for this financial year was that expenses exceeded income by \$3,670.75. To put this into perspective, expenses have exceeded income by a total of less than \$1000 in three of the seven years since the year 2000. Income (primarily from conference surpluses) in the other four years exceeded expenses, and our end of year balance has increased from \$7,800 in 2000 to a peak of \$31,400 last year. We therefore remain in a strong position, able to support conference travel for as many worthy students as apply. With our name changing to a more general and hopefully more inclusive title, we would like to encourage as many new full members as possible. With increased numbers of professional members, new students members will follow, as will applications for student travel support.

Our accounts have again been reviewed free of charge by Tania Delahunty, a chartered accountant and manager of Finance and Management Accounting at the Tauranga City Council.

Mike Clearwater  
Secretary / Treasurer NZSPP