



## **President's Report 2007**

This is our 29th annual meeting as an incorporated society, and our first as the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists! I apologise that teaching commitments at Otago have kept me from attending this year. However, Matthew Turnbull (as immediate Past President) has agreed to chair the meeting and Mike Clearwater our Secretary and Treasurer is also on hand to ensure the smooth running of the AGM.

As we have noted before it is a great pleasure for our Society to meet with our colleagues in the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science. This linking underscores the important role that our members play in supporting research into plant production in New Zealand and the important questions that are often raised in applied research. This year we have supported four students from outside the Canterbury region to attend and we are pleased to see the participation of our student members in both speaking and poster slots. We also welcome Professor Steve Tyerman, of the University of Adelaide, as our 2007 Annals of Botany Speaker and we look forward to the plenary address from this year's winner of our Roger Slack Award in Plant Biology, Associate Professor Kevin Gould.

### **Outstanding Physiologist Name change**

This year introduces our new Roger Slack Award in Plant Biology which replaces our Outstanding Physiologist award. In effect the criteria of the award remains the same as that of its predecessor: to recognise outstanding work by a society member, based on the merit of original published research in one area over the past five years. However, under the new name we recognise our intention to consider plant scientists undertaking research in any area of plant biology who are members of our society.

We are grateful to Roger, a founding member of our Society, to agree to his name being "attached" to our award. Roger Slack, who with Marshall Hatch was the co-discoverer of C4 photosynthesis, had an outstanding career in plant science. Please go to our website to read a brief biography and a summary of Roger's contributions to plant biology in New Zealand and internationally.

### **The 2007 Roger Slack Award in Plant Biology**

Following on from above we are therefore very pleased to welcome Associate Professor Kevin Gould (Otago University) as the 2007 recipient of the Roger Slack Award in Plant Biology. Kevin studies the ecophysiology of native New Zealand plants. His research indicates that leaves and stems may be more tolerant of environmental stressors if they are pigmented red, rather than

green. By absorbing high-energy quanta, anthocyanin pigments protect chloroplasts from the photoinhibitory and photooxidative effects of strong light under chilling temperatures. Real-time imaging of red cells indicated that anthocyanins also mitigate oxidative stress by efficiently scavenging free radicals. Kevin's recent work suggests that anthocyanins may also serve as honest signals of defence commitment against herbivores. These pigments may be critical for plant survival.

I am pleased to announce that the Royal Society has confirmed that we will be presenting Kevin with the award at their November presentation evening which is to be held in Dunedin.

### **Student attendance at International Meetings**

It is also gratifying to report that we have supported 5 students to attend international meetings in Australia, the USA and Europe this year. These are in addition to a further 7 students who attended our annual conference in Brisbane (COMBIO 2006) and a further 4 awards to other international meetings last year. This is an important activity of our society and provides an important lift to the careers of our up-and-coming plant biologists.

### **NZSPB Annual Meeting 2008**

I am pleased to confirm that our 2008 annual meeting will be held together with the New Zealand Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and the New Zealand Institute of Chemistry in Dunedin. The dates are Sunday 7 December to Thursday 11 December 2008. The meeting will be in the recently opened St David Lecture theatre complex and organised by akB Conference Management Limited. This promises to be an excellent meeting with approximately 400 registrants expected. I am representing us on the organising committee and will bring you updates as details emerge.

### **Membership numbers**

Our total membership stands at approximately 107 Full Members, 39 Associate Members (chiefly our student cohort) and 7 Life Members. These numbers are similar to last year but do not indicate any growth. I believe that we need to be vigilant here and that recruitment needs to be part of our activity in the year ahead. I would also like to mention that the Council has approved the notion that limited support be provided to local meetings of society members. Such applications will be considered on a case by case basis. While the expected level of support is modest it is our intention that supporting local meetings built around visiting speakers or similar activities be used to advertise and recruit new members to our society.

It is also appropriate here to endorse the proposal from last year's AGM that we increase our annual subscription fee. This will help bring some sensible streamlining to our operations if we adopt multiple year memberships along with increasing revenue. This will also aid in stabilising our membership by removing the need to chase up subscriptions on a yearly basis.

## **Vice President and the make up of the Council in the future**

We are currently operating without a Vice President. Typically the Vice President serves two years on the Council and then goes on to become President for two years. However, we are in the fortunate position that our current Treasurer and Secretary has expressed an interest in standing as our next President. I am delighted with this, as I am sure we all are, given Mike Clearwater's ongoing commitment to the society. It should be pointed out that Mike's contributions as Treasurer and Secretary have provided continuity and efficiency to our operations and it will prove a difficult act to follow. We must now think ahead and plan for an equally efficient arrangement in the years to come. In this regard we should consider splitting the roles of Treasurer and Secretary on the Council. In addition, we might also consider a Council member be selected for chairing an Awards Committee drawn from Council (or other co-opted members) to oversee the judging of student talks and posters at our annual meetings and coordinating the Roger Slack Award deliberations. I believe our AGM this year is the correct place to begin to discuss these ideas.

Finally, on behalf of all our members, I would like to acknowledge the constant support and input of the Council throughout the year.

Julian Eaton-Rye  
President, NZSPB



### **Treasurer's Report 2007**

The statement of receipts and payments for the year ended 31 March 2007 is attached.

As of 31 March 2006 we had 153 members on our books (107 Full Members, 39 Associate Members and 7 Life Members), a similar number to last year.

Total income was \$3,139.59 less than last year, reflecting the fact that the Annals of Botany speaker for COMBIO 2006 was hosted by the ASPS. Subscription income actually increased by \$1,603.71, the result of increased efforts to keep members up-to-date, and interest payments increased by \$356.70 after most of our savings were transferred to a higher interest BNZ term saver account.

Total expenses were also \$5,715.24 lower than last year, also largely because we were not hosting the Annals of Botany speaker. Other costs were similar, with \$350 more spent on student awards, \$54.70 more spent on postage (the postal ballot on the change in society name), and a total of \$425.47 spent on the Outstanding Physiologist medal and reception at Lincoln for the recipient, Margaret Barbour.

Student subsidies and prizes increased by \$350 to a total of \$5,050 this year. We were happy to provide \$400 each to 7 students (Matthew Woods, Nick Albert, Fiona Bentley, Marissa Roldan, Jollanda Effendy, Aluh Nikmatullah, Ludivine Thomas) in support of their attendance and presentations at our annual conference in Brisbane (COMBIO 2006). A further \$400 each was awarded to Elizabeth Jaya and Nilangani Pathirana who presented at 8th International Congress of Plant Molecular Biology in Adelaide, \$400 to Fiona Bentley who presented at the 12th International Symposium on Phototrophic Prokaryotes in Pau, France, and \$600 to Jan Binnie who presented at the 7th International Ethylene Conference in Pisa, Italy. Marissa Roldan and Ludivine Thomas 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 \$1,095.10, although we remain in a good financial position with a \$26,614.42 year end balance. However, we have recently committed to providing \$3000 as seed money for COMBIO 2009 (to be held in Christchurch), and \$5000 in support of the second Plants in Action text book project (led by ASPS). The council has also decided to provide travel support of up to \$1500 per annum to aid members in bringing visiting speakers to regional sites, as a way of increasing the profile of the society. As outlined in last year's report, our positive bank balance has accumulated over the last seven years through a series of conference surpluses – these are outside of our control, and it is difficult to determine if they will continue. With the spending planned for the 2007-2008 year we will have been eroding this reserve for three years in a row. It is therefore worthwhile considering what the financial policy of the Society should be – should we attempt to retain a cash reserve to fund awards and student travel, and how large should this be? At present our annual subscription charges are exceptionally low (\$25 for full members, \$10 for students), and have not changed since 1999. Current annual income from subscriptions and interest is therefore around \$4000. The proposal to increase the Society's subscription charges on this year's AGM agenda is therefore aimed at bringing our regular income a little closer to (but still less than) our average regular spending. After this change our fees will still be lower than most other societies', and I believe we will remain an attractive option for students and full members looking for the conferences, seminars, awards and travel benefits we provide.

I am late this year having our accounts reviewed, this is normally done by Tania Delahunty, a chartered accountant and manager of Finance and Management Accounting at the Tauranga City Council. I discovered too late that she was on annual leave until recently, she has agreed to review the books in the next few weeks, the results will then be made available to society members.

Mike Clearwater

Secretary / Treasurer NZSPB