



New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists

President's Report 2012

Welcome to the 34th annual meeting as an incorporated Society. This year we are meeting as part of the Combio 2012 conference in Adelaide, Australia. We participate in this meeting every three years and every nine years the meeting is held in New Zealand. This is an excellent opportunity for New Zealand Plant Biologists to meet with members of other “local” societies and share the exciting research that is pushing the frontiers of our respective disciplines. This is my first year as President of the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists and as one would expect it has been a learning curve. In respect to this, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation for the contribution of the Council of the Society and in particular Marian McKenzie (Society Secretary) and Mike Clearwater (past President). Marian and Mike have consistently provided excellent advice and support.

Throughout the year I have participated in a number of activities that relate to the Society. These activities have contributed to improving the scientific landscape for our members, postgraduates and New Zealand in general. I do, however, feel that we do not have a sufficiently high profile considering the importance to New Zealand of our discipline. Plant biology research is critical to underpin and future proof the economy of New Zealand and I am concerned that this is not fully recognised. I am particularly interested to improve the quality of undergraduate education, to increase the resources available to support “cutting edge” postgraduate research and to alleviate the absurd lack of positions for Post-Doctoral researchers. When are we going to take providing a career path for young scientists seriously? If you feel the same, I welcome any suggestions as to how the Society can help and indeed I welcome your comments on how the Society can be improved and make changes to meet future challenges.

Roger Slack Award 2012

It is a great pleasure for me to announce that Dr David Chagné is the 2012 Roger Slack Award winner. The Roger Slack Award is the major award of our Society and David is a very worthy recipient. David gained his PhD in 2004 with research on forest genetics while at INRA, Bordeaux, France. He is now a senior scientist in breeding and genomics at The New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research at Palmerston North. David's research is focussed on understanding the genetic control of complex horticultural traits with the intent of improving the breeding efficiency of new varieties. He has worked extensively on apple and has made a substantive contribution through his excellent research. In addition to his contribution to plant genomics, David has held a number of research leadership roles and received academic recognition for his in depth understanding of his subject area. He has been project leader for Dumont D'Urville and Marie Currie programmes and is Associate Editor

for BMC Genomics and Tree Genomes and Genetics. In addition, David was a finalist in 2011 for the Young Biotechnologist of the Year Award. I am sure that you will agree with me and the selection committee that David Chagné is an outstanding young scientist that fully deserves the 2012 Roger Slack Award.

David Chagné will present the Roger Slack Award address, entitled “The genetic and environmental control of harvest date, dry matter content and firmness in apple fruit” at the 2012 Combio meeting in Adelaide. David will be presented with the award prior to his lecture.

Royal Society of New Zealand Biological and Life Sciences Vice Presidents Advisory Panel

I have attended two meetings of this panel and feel this is likely to be an important forum. Essentially this panel is comprised of Presidents of all New Zealand Societies meeting under the auspices of the NZ Royal Society. Professor Stephen Goldson chaired these meetings and a broad range of topics were discussed. These included: the outcome of the HSNO Act consultation, a review of RSNZ supported International Unions and water fluoridation. We also met with invited dignitaries, such as Professor Sir Peter Gluckman, Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister and Dr Geoff Ridley, Science Manager for ERMA (new organisms). Stephen has now retired from this post and Dr John Caradus FRSNZ will chair future meetings. This is early days for this group, but I feel very positive about the contribution it will make. One aspect does need to be considered and that is how the panel disseminates their deliberations to their respective Societies and how this panel can influence the actions of the NZ Royal Society to inform Ministries associated with science and technology and importantly government policies.

Meeting with MS & I regarding Rutherford Discovery Fellowships and Post-Doctoral Support

On 29th November 2011 a number of invited people met with Dr Prue Williams (Chief Science Advisor, Ministry of Science and Innovation) and other MS & I staff. The discussions were to consider the success or otherwise of the relatively new Rutherford Discovery Fellowship, but also for a more general discussion on the present availability of Post-Doctoral Fellowships. The discussions were wide ranging and there was agreement that the present situation was unacceptable. A number of aspects were addressed, such as the lack of Post-Doctoral funding immediately after completion of PhDs, reduction in University funded Post-Doctoral Fellowships and those from other organisations, e.g. AgMardt, how best to fund Post-Doctoral research (e.g. sharing with industry and CRIs and potential for targeted strategic funding), etc. The most efficient way of funding was considered, given that no new money is likely to be available. There was a general consensus that it was appropriate to have most Post-Doctoral Fellowships funding straight after PhDs and perhaps a few more prestigious Rutherford Discovery Fellowships later (not too late as careers should really be established by 10 years post PhD!). The RDFs might be on a biannual or a tri-annual cycle. The nature of the funding was also considered including who could apply (issues over

applications from staff with permanent positions), less emphasis on leadership, etc. The intention was for the MS & I review group to collect all the feedback from a variety of meetings and provide recommendations as to the future “package of Post-Doctoral support”.

This year the Rutherford Fellowships have been revised. My impression is that this revision has been less than what was required, but I would welcome comments from NZSPB members on this important area.

NZSPB travel awards in 2012

It is a major role of the Society to contribute support to travel for postgraduate students. I am very pleased that we have been able to help a number of students as detailed in the Treasurer’s report. The funding for this support has been significantly enhanced this year by a gift from the organisers of a very successful International Ethylene meeting held in Rotorua. I would like to acknowledge this generous donation on behalf of our Society and the postgraduate students that will benefit from enhanced travel opportunities to attend conferences.

Future Meetings

The 2013 meeting of the Society will be held in Palmerston North in association with the NZIAHS. Minutes from an organisation meeting are below:

In attendance: David Lewis, incoming President of NZIAHS; Brian Jordan, President of NZSPB; Jason Wargent, INR, Massey University; Andrew East, IFNHH Massey University; Julian Heyes, IFNHH Massey University.

Apologies: Marian McKenzie (NZSPB secretary); Professor Michael McManus (Massey University)

NZIAHS and NZSPB agree to host a joint meeting in Palmerston North with profit sharing on the basis of registrations. NZIAHS has a ‘conference reserve’ fund that can assist in the event of an unforeseen problem with the meeting. Planning (including prudent budgeting) should aim for a small profit and budget will need to be approved by NZIAHS council. There is some potential to invite extra attendees from Australia involved in postharvest research but Julian is reluctant to promote this as a full Australasian Postharvest Conference when it falls just over a year before the International Horticultural Congress in Brisbane, August 2014.

1. Preferred dates: suggest approximately 2 days of science plus half a day for the NZIAHS Forum; in the period Tue-Thu 2-4 July 2013. Perhaps aim for 10 a.m. start on first day to allow people to arrive that morning; second day has science in morning moving into a half-day Forum and finishing with conference dinner; and then morning only on third day? But will people stay for third day under that structure?
2. Preferred registration costs: aim to keep low, ca. \$250 a day for day registration, ca. \$600 for full three day registration (if we have a three day meeting!). Jenny Taylor, NZIAHS secretariat, has agreed to provide conference support and we will get an itemised quote from Massey PCO (Sarah Siebert) for handling accommodation,

registration website etc. Budget to be prepared needs to span likely attendance range from 75-125 attendees.

3. Accommodation: may not be possible to get low-cost student accommodation; but we will keep trying to secure this, with 30-50 rooms in a block being our preference. Sandi Shillington, Registrar, has been approached. Rugby Institute may have additional facilities. Check breakfast available in vacation (JAH).
4. Possible session themes (for discussion, revision):
Plants and environment (including climate change, light, temp, etc): Brian J Horticultural Innovation to achieve a 'step change': Jason W (may include: new technologies in horticulture e.g. LEDs, harvesting robots, nanotech...)
Predicting quality (at or after harvest): Andrew E
Innovation in plant improvement:
Also: algae for energy; IMBS themes; Fruit & Veg for health?
Additional session chairs: committee members plus Michael McManus, other Council members and contacts
5. NZIAHS Political forum will be during the meeting; could have a focus on "High-technology innovation in agriculture and horticulture". Would be good to include stakeholders in invitations: Zespri, PipfruitNZ, LeaderBrand, HortNZ, MPI, MBIE, Ballance, Ravensdown.

All contributions towards the success of this meeting are welcome.

Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to thank the Council for their contribution to the Society (Philippa Barrell, David Collings, Kevin Gould, Nick Gould and Mike Clearwater), Rainer Hofmann as Vice President, Tina Summerfield as Treasurer and Marian McKenzie as Secretary. This year we made a submission to the Environmental Protection Authority to support an application to import and develop *Arabidopsis thaliana* in containment (Ref. number ERMA200706 and ERMA2007). I would like to acknowledge the major contribution of Philippa Barrell to this submission which undoubtedly contributed to a successful outcome.

Professor Brian Jordan

(President of the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists)

12.9.2012



New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists

Treasurer's Report 2012

As of 31st March 2012 we had 156 members on our books (98 Full Members, 51 Associate Members and 7 Life Members), a similar number to last year.

Total income was \$2,103.06, from members subscription and interest on term saver account, this is slightly decreased on last year. A major difference between this year and last year was that this year there was no conference income (although there will be income next financial year from the Ethylene conference). Total expenses were \$5,060.50, less than last year as there was no expenditure on website this year. Student subsidies and prizes were slightly decreased this year compared to last year to a total of \$4,300 this year. Nine students received travel awards, this included awards for four awards of \$800 for international conference attendance and five awards for local conference attendance. Travel awards were given to: Afsana Islam, Daniel Morrison, Diantha Smith, Kate Calcott, Rachael Lawrence Lodge, Rubina Jibrán, Sristi Joshi, Mary Black and Darrell Lizamore. In addition, Kate Calcott was awarded \$100 for the best student speaker at the NZSPB meeting.

Tina Summerfield

Treasurer NZSPB