



Presidents Report 2014

Welcome to the 36th annual meeting as an incorporated Society. This year we are meeting in Queenstown as part of the Plant Molecular Biology satellite of the Queenstown Molecular Biology conference. The programme looks very interesting and as usual we will hold our Society AGM, dinner and awards at the conference.

Roger Slack Award

It is a great pleasure to announce that the recipient of the 2014 Roger Slack Award is Dr Nick Albert. The Roger Slack Award is the major award of our Society and this year was open to researchers within ten years of submitting their PhD. Nick gained his PhD in Plant Molecular Biology from Massey University in 2010 and his research was included in the Dean's list of exceptional Doctoral Thesis. In addition, during this period he was a finalist in the MacDiarmid Young Scientist of the Year Award and received the best speaker award at the NZ Society of Plant Biologists 2008 annual conference. Nick continued his research as a Post-Doctoral Fellow at CSIRO, Canberra, Massey University and AgResearch. Nick's research has focused on understanding the biosynthesis of flavonoid pigments, particularly the regulation of anthocyanins and tannins in response to biotic and abiotic, particularly light, stress. His research has been published in the top plant journals, including Plant Cell and Plant Journal as first author and Phytochemistry and the Journal of Experimental Botany. These studies have made a substantive contribution to understanding the role of transcriptional activators and repressors in anthocyanin biosynthesis. Nick is an enthusiastic young scientist and has contributed to other research areas, including ethylene and sulphur metabolism, epigenetics and genome sequencing. He even won the logo design competition for the NZ Society of Plant Biologists! Nick is now working at Plant and Food Research, Palmerston North on a prestigious Marsden Post-Doctoral Fellowship. Nick is a very worthy winner of the Roger Slack Award and I have no doubt he has a stellar career ahead of him.

Global Plant Council

This year we joined the Global Plant Council which was established in 2010 as a coalition of national plant and crop science societies from around the world to work on solutions to global issues that impact the future of our world and humanity. The present GPC executive is Dr Ruth Bastow who is a very proactive individual (see ruth@globalplantcouncil.org and <http://globalplantcouncil.org>)

Our Society became a member on 19.2.2014 and we look forward to substantive interactions within this global organisation. Another initiative has been to develop a stronger relationship with the American Society of Plant Biologists. To this end we have agreed on a reciprocal arrangement to offer members of the respective Societies discounted rates to attend conferences organised by NZSPB and ASPB.

Vice Presidents committee

As in previous years I have continued to press for improvements in career development for young scientists. This has often been very frustrating trying to make substantive progress. However, at the last meeting on the 8th April it was announced that the President of the Royal Society, Professor Sir David Skegg was to review the NZ system for research in science, technology and humanities. At the time the committee was told that our advocacy for improvements in career development for young scientist had been important and would be addressed in the review. I have since gained access to the terms of reference for the review thanks to the president of the committee, Dr John Caradus and Sir David Skegg. I am delighted that one of the TORs is "Career development including doctoral training, postdoctoral, RA and research scientist positions". The review is extensive and is expected to take 12-18 months although draft position papers will be circulated earlier. This is a great opportunity to look at science in NZ and Sir David and the Royal Society deserve praise for taking a lead in this much needed initiative.

Development of the Web

The present NZSPB web site uses ExpressionEngine and is difficult to work with. Consequently interaction with members is problematic! Philippa Barrell and Mike Clearwater are working to improve the system. An agreement has been made with the Royal Society to host our site and Mike has suggested using Wordpress to recreate our site. Philippa is hoping to have something functional to show at the AGM and will be asking for feedback.

Travel Awards

It is a major role of our Society to provide travel awards for our postgraduate students. The financial support that we have provided is in the treasurer's report. In addition to postgraduate students it was decided last year that a number of awards should be given to support technical staff who are part of our Society. Two awards of up to \$500 will be offered each year to assist the career development of technical staff. The award can be made for conference, workshop or training course attendance or to visit another laboratory. I think this is an excellent initiative and expands the support that the Society can give to its members.

Annual and Future meetings

Last year's Annual meeting (Plant Science 2013) was held with the NZIAHS at Palmerston North. I am sure those who attended had a very productive time. In addition to the excellent science this smaller meeting had a wonderful interactive feeling about it that often gets lost in the larger meetings. An additional benefit was that the conference made a profit for the Society of \$3926.33. For future meetings we will again be participating in Combio 2015 in Australia. In addition we have held preliminary discussions with the NZ branch of the International Association for Plant Biotechnology and NZIAHS for a joint meeting, possibly in 2016.

Term over for Presidency

It is now time for me to hand over the President's position to the very capable hands of Dr Rainer Hofmann from Lincoln University. Rainer was an ex PhD of mine and so I have watched with great pleasure his successful career development. Rainer is truly an enthusiast for our discipline. He has published many interesting articles on his research into UV-B effects, primarily on pasture species. In addition, he has recently been awarded a prestigious teaching excellence award which reflects his broad range of capabilities.

From my own point of view, I have enjoyed my time as President with many high points particularly around the Roger Slack and student awards. I have tried very hard to raise the problem of career pathways for our young scientists. I have got lots of support and now feel that with the Royal Society review we may get some real traction. This, however, will undoubtedly be an ongoing battle! I would also like to leave a few thoughts for the future. Firstly, I do not think that there is enough public and political recognition of the contribution that plant biology and plant science in all its many forms

contributes to both human knowledge and the NZ economy. I would like this to be a future initiative to communicate the significant role of plant biology/science (and something that our Society can and should address). Secondly, I would really like the administrative costs of science to be reduced and the funding to go to the “coal face” as more positions, equipment and operational funding. With all due respect to University and CRI administration it is the scientists that deliver the outputs and outcomes. Good luck with that one!

Acknowledgements

Finally thanks to all of the New Zealand Plant Biology Society Council for their continued hard work. I am very grateful for their support to the Society which is invaluable. In particular, I would like to thank Nick Gould who will step down this year from the council after 8 years. I would also especially like to thank Marian McKenzie who has provided me with constant support throughout my term. Marian deserves real praise for her knowledge, enthusiasm and sensible advice on the many issues and problems that arise.

Professor Brian Jordan

(President of the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists)

4.8.2014



Treasurer's Report 2014

As of 31st March 2014 we had 151 members on our books (94 Full Members, 50 Associate Members and 7 Life Members), a similar number to last year.

Total income was \$2,391.76; mostly, income was from member's subscriptions and the remainder was from interest on our term saver account. Income was decreased compared to last year as it did not include any conference surplus. Total expenses were \$3,006.25, less than last year primarily due to decreased payments to support students for travel. Three students received travel awards, this included a travel award of \$450 for international conference attendance to Jared Fudge and awards to Matthew Van Voorthuizen (\$300) and Kate Calcott (\$200). NZSPB conference prizes of \$100 each were awarded to Kate Calcott and Jessica Roche for best talk and poster, respectively. Expenditure for the Roger Slack Award was increased compared to last year and included cost of the awardee Richard Macknight's conference registration and accommodation.

The bulk of our funds are held in a term saver that earns interest of 2.60% pa. Please could you discuss whether it would be worth transferring some of this to a longer-term saver or alternative account that would yield more interest.

Tina Summerfield

Treasurer NZSPB