



## 38<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

QMB 2016, Nelson

### President's Report, Rainer Hofmann

This is my last report at the conclusion of my term as NZSPB President. It has been an immense pleasure and honour to represent our Society since 2014. There were many highlights, including conferring NZSPB awards to students and researchers and representing the Society in a variety of forums, including national and international conferences, at governmental levels as well as on an emerging global plant biology platform. Here is my report for 2015/2016:

#### Michael McManus Award

Professor Michael McManus (Massey University) passed away in 2015. Michael was a wonderful colleague, inspiring teacher, top researcher and highly regarded contributor to our Society. He has mentored many students and emerging researchers who have subsequently made their mark in New Zealand and overseas. To honour Michael, NZSPB has created new award in his name to recognise student researchers in the field of plant biology in New Zealand.

This year is the first year of NZSPB conferring this award and Afsana Islam is the recipient of the 2016 Michael McManus Award for Best Student Paper<sup>1</sup>. The paper examined the role of a family of Kunitz proteinase inhibitor (KPI) genes isolated from white clover. The results indicate a central role in the maintenance of cellular homeostasis for a member of the KPI gene family.

Afsana will receive her award at QMB 2016 in Nelson, where she will also present the findings of her paper. Congratulations to Afsana on receiving this inaugural award!

<sup>1</sup>Islam A, Leung S, Burgess EPJ, Laing WA, Richardson KA, Hofmann RW, Dijkwel PP, McManus MT (2015). Knock-down of transcript abundance of a family of Kunitz Proteinase Inhibitor genes in white clover (*Trifolium repens* L.) reveals a redundancy and diversity of gene function. *New Phytologist* 208: 1188-1201.

## Roger Slack Award 2016

The Roger Slack Award in Plant Biology is the major research recognition of our Society. It is conferred annually to one of its members in recognition of outstanding contribution to the study of plant biology. It is named after Dr Roger Slack in recognition of his outstanding contribution as a plant biologist in NZ and overseas, including his role in the discovery of C4 photosynthesis (the Hatch-Slack Pathway), as well as his contribution as a founding member of our Society.

The recipient of this year's Roger Slack Award is Dr Cate McInnis-Ng from the University of Auckland. As a plant ecophysiolgist, Dr Macinnis-Ng specialises in plant functional responses to environmental conditions. She is particularly interested in the impact of climatic variability and change on carbon and water fluxes of forests. Since moving to New Zealand in 2010, Cate has been exploring the physiology of our largest and longest-lived tree, the kauri. Among key findings Cate has found evidence for drought adaptations in a species previously thought to be highly vulnerable to water stress. This research has laid the groundwork for a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship exploring limits of drought tolerance.

Cate will be presented with her award at QMB 2016 in Nelson, where she will give a plenary address on her recent research. Congratulations to Cate on this excellent achievement!

## Global Plant Council

NZSPB joined the Global Plant Council (GPC) ([www.globalplantcouncil.org](http://www.globalplantcouncil.org)) in 2014. The GPC is an international coalition of 28 societies representing plant, crop, agricultural and environmental sciences. Its mission is to facilitate the development of plant science for tackling global challenges, to foster international collaborations, to enable the effective use of knowledge and resources, as well as providing an independent and inclusive international forum that brings together all those involved in plant research, education and training.

GPC activities include *DivSeek* ([www.divseek.org](http://www.divseek.org)) to develop a global genebank database to harness crop diversity for global food security, and *Plantae*, a plant science resource hub.

I will attend the GPC Annual General Meeting in Brisbane in October 2016 to discuss closer relations of NZSPB with the GPC.

## Vice Presidents' Committee

This committee is co-ordinated by the Royal Society of New Zealand and meets twice a year in Wellington. Membership consists of the Executive of 11 NZ biological and life science organisations, including NZSPB. The Committee provides advice to RSNZ on matters of concern to the biological and life sciences community. It has recently begun to gather experts for public advice working groups. The first project aims to provide a fact sheet to raise the understanding of gene editing technologies as a precursor to a wider project looking at the implications of the technologies for New Zealand. Our very own Andrew Allan (NZ Institute for Plant & Food Research and University of Auckland) has been signed up to write the fact sheet!

Other discussions resulting from recent RSNZ meetings included the idea of forming a NZ Federation of Biological Societies. Advantages would include consolidation of administrative activities and generation of critical mass of an interest group of biological scientists in NZ. One disadvantage could include the loss of autonomy, especially for smaller biological societies. Discussions are at an exploratory stage only at this point, and views from NZSPB members are welcomed.

## NZSPB website

Our recently rejuvenated website has provided NZSPB with an attractive window to the world and has clearly facilitated the process of joining and renewing NZSPB memberships. A big thankyou to Mike Clearwater for your instrumental work in this regard!

## Awards

In addition to the Roger Slack Award and the Michael McManus award, NZSPB offers several other prizes. This includes the Travel Award for our postgraduate student members, as well as the Technician's Career Development Award. The latter supports NZSPB technical staff members for training and travel, e.g. to conferences, workshops, other research institutes and laboratories. Awards for best NZSPB student member presentations will again be conferred at QMB 2016 in Nelson.

## Annual and future meetings

Last year's AGM at Combio 2015 in Melbourne commemorated Michael McManus's achievements and contributions with the NZSPB Life Membership Award for Michael. The recipient of the 2015 Roger Slack Award was Andrew Allan who gave a plenary address on his research. The meeting also provided the historic milestone of several NZSPB members beaming into the meeting from NZ via Skype. Details for our 2017 AGM will be announced in due course.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to again acknowledge all the NZSPB Council members for their contributions this year and wholeheartedly trust the NZSPB leadership into Marian McKenzie's very capable hands. Marian is a NZSPB stalwart who has been a fantastic Secretary since 2008, after serving as a NZSPB Council member since 1999! Of note is also that Marian is the first female NZSPB President in three decades – it is good to see that gender imbalance starting to be addressed. Last but not least, thanks are also due to Mike Clearwater for his huge contribution to the Society over 14 years as long-term Secretary, Treasurer and President.