



NZSPB 37th Annual Meeting, Combio 2015, Melbourne

President's Report, Rainer Hofmann

Life Member Award

Many of you will have known Professor Michael McManus (Massey University) who sadly passed away recently. In Paula Jameson's words "we have lost a pillar of plant biology, a superb supervisor, a true friend and colleague and a genuinely kind man". Michael was as an inspirational teacher and mentor for many of us. Michael was also an instrumental and highly regarded contributor to our society, including serving as NZSPB president from 2000-2002. Michael was recognised nationally and internationally for the outstanding contributions to his field of research, which in recent years had focused on gaining deep understanding of metabolic pathways in plants.

For all these achievements, the Council had decided to confer a NZSPB Life Member Award at this year's annual meeting to Michael and he was thrilled when he was alerted to this earlier in the year. Life membership is a rare honour given to persons who have contributed in an outstanding way to the Society and to plant biology in New Zealand. The Life Member Award for Michael will be conferred posthumously at our annual meeting at Combio 2015. We are also planning to create a special NZSPB Award in Michael's name.

Roger Slack Award 2015

The Roger Slack Award is the major research recognition of our Society and was a particular delight to confer this year's Roger Slack Award to Dr Andrew Allan (NZ Institute for Plant & Food Research, and University of Auckland). Andrew gained his PhD in 1992 at Cambridge University. Returning to NZ in 1997 he joined Plant and Food Research, and lectured at Auckland University from 2003, where is now Associate Professor. He is Director for the Joint Graduate School in Plant and Food Science, project leader for several genomics programmes, and full Professor in two Chinese Universities.

Andrew's research centres on the plant's response to the environment via the transcriptional regulation of key molecular pathways. An understanding of these

responses allows improvement in plant growth and breeding of new varieties for NZ's benefit. Andrew's work on a variety of cultivated plants has produced significant discoveries in fundamental research. Some of his most recent research has focused on transcriptional regulation of anthocyanins, carotenoids, and chlorophyll in fruits, flowers and vegetables. His research has been published in top plant science journals. His standing in the field is reflected by the number of active international research collaborations with investigators from Italy, China, Thailand, Spain, South Africa, The Netherlands, Australia, and America. In 2002 Andrew was awarded the NZSPB Outstanding Physiologist Award, the predecessor to the Roger Slack Award, for research conducted within 10 years of gaining his PhD.

Andrew will be presented with his award at Combio 2015, where he will give a plenary address on his recent research.

Global Plant Council

After joining the UK-based Global Plant Council last year (www.globalplantcouncil.org), Marian and myself have recently held discussions with the new GPC President, eminent scientist Professor Bill Davies and the enthusiastic GPC Executive Director Dr Ruth Bastow. The Global Plant Council is an international coalition of 29 societies representing plant, crop and agricultural and environmental sciences across the globe. Essentially it is a specialist plant science network to address global challenges such as world hunger, energy, climate change, health and well-being, sustainability and environmental protection.

Our very fruitful discussions included GPC activities such as *DivSeek* (www.divseek.org) to develop a global genebank database to harness crop diversity for global food security, and *Plantae*, a plant science resource hub (think LinkedIn + ResearchGate, but specifically for plant biologists). The planned Global Plant Science Status Report (coordinated by Bill, with contributions from other world-leading plant scientists) shapes up as an inspirational document to bring critical topics in plant science to the scientific community and beyond.

Next step is to discuss how NZSPB can best interact with and contribute to this emerging global plant science network. Becoming *DivSeek* partners and signing up for a *plantae.org* account (once it is live) seem sensible first steps.

Vice Presidents' Committee

This committee is co-ordinated by the Royal Society of New Zealand. It provides advice to RSNZ on matters of concern to the biological and life sciences community. In this committee we are joined by 10 other NZ biological and life science organisations and we meet twice a year at RSNZ in Wellington. At our recent meeting we discussed new roles for the committee, including raising the profile and status of

the biological and life sciences sector, developing links with other disciplines and changing the nature of the expert panel process so that the Royal Society can quickly provide informed positions to government when required. This will be of particular importance when dealing with complex issues of public concern. Societies like ours are the point of difference by being able to provide expertise without constraints by political process.

NZSPB website

Mike Clearwater has recently redeveloped the NZSPB website and in the process revitalised the process of joining and renewing NZSPB memberships. Members can now use the membership list to post information on the NZSPB website on regional events and groups (e.g. for the Lincoln and Palmerston North Plant Biology Seminar series), and the mailing list can also be used to advertise and link to them. The email list can be used by all members e.g. to advertise positions or to ask for advice. Well done Mike, and we also thank Philippa Barrell for her work on the website preceding these new developments.

Awards

In addition to the Life Member Award and Roger Slack Award, NZSPB offers several other prizes. This includes the Travel Award for our postgraduate student members, as well as the recently established 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 Combio 2015.

Annual and future meetings

Last year's annual meeting at QMB 2014 celebrated the achievements of young researchers in the form of Nick Albert receiving the Roger Slack Award, and also marked the conclusion of Brian Jordan's fruitful term as NZSPB president. For 2016, there have been preliminary discussions with NZIAHS for a joint meeting. Further details will be announced in due course.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all the NZSPB council members and in particular Marian McKenzie and Mike Clearwater. Marian is multitasking as an incredibly supportive and active Vice President and Secretary who is extremely passionate and knowledgeable about our Society. And Mike has by now fulfilled every possible role at NZSPB over the years. And he is now coming back for more, as our treasurer and has recently revamped the NZSPB website to great acclaim. Many thanks to you all for your continued support and I look forward to another successful year for NZSPB and its members.