



New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists

President's Report 2017

Welcome to our 39th AGM as an incorporated society. This year we are happy to meet with the NZ Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science (NZIAHS) and the NZ branch of the International Association of Plant Biotechnology (NZIAPB) at '**Plant Science Central 2017**' in Palmerston North. The Plant Science Central concept builds on the success of our 2013 meeting with NZIAHS at "Plant Science 2013", and a subsequent meeting between NZIAHS and NZIAPB in 2015 "Plants for the Future." This year the three societies meet together for the first time in what we hope will become a biannual feature in New Zealand's biology conference calendar.

The aim of Plant Science Central is to provide a local conference feel, which allows speaking slots for our students and plenty of chances for interaction between delegates, while maintaining an international flavour. This year we have three international key note speakers, including our Society's nomination for the **Annals of Botany Lecturer**, Dr Yves Gibon of the University of Boudreaux. We are very grateful for the generous support from the Annals of Botany, allowing us to bring Yves to New Zealand this year. He will be speaking on the final day of the conference in the first Plant Development Session.

One of the major roles of our society is to support the career development of our members by organising meetings and providing support for students to travel to meetings. This year we have provided assistance for seven students to attend Plant Science Central 2017 as well as three students presenting their research at international conferences. We have also awarded our **Technician's Award** for the first time this year, supporting Robyn Lee of the University of Otago to attend Plant Science Central 2017.

Sadly, since our last meeting two of our key founding members have passed away. **Dr Rod Bialeski**, who was a founding member of NZSPB (then the NZ Society of Plant Physiologists), became the Society's first life member in 1996. Rod died in November last year after a short illness. Also, **Dr Roger Slack**, also one of our founding members and who the major research award of our Society is named for. Roger died in October of 2016, making this year's award in his memory particularly poignant.

This year's recipient of the **Roger Slack Award in Plant Biology** is Dr Kimberley Snowden of The NZ Institute for Plant & Food Research. The Award recognises Kim's outstanding contribution to our understanding of strigolactone activity and perception, with her group being the first to identify the strigolactone receptor, this work being published in 2012. Further work by her group has clarified the link between environmental signals and plant architecture, including nutrient deficits and light quality changes and has led to significant advances in the strigolactone field by other groups. We congratulate Kim on this outstanding achievement. She will be making her address on the first day of the conference in the first Plants and the Environment Session.

This is the second year **The Michael McManus Award for Best Student Paper** has been made in honor of Professor Michael McManus who was an inspirational teacher and supervisor for his students and a mentor for many of his colleagues. He was also a highly regarded member of our Society and was President from 2000-2002. This year the recipient of The Michael McManus Award for Best Student Paper is Ben Peters of the University of Otago for his paper “A Conserved cis-Regulatory Module Determines Germline Fate through Activation of the Transcription Factor DUO1 Promoter”, which was published in Plant Physiology earlier this year. Congratulations to Ben on his achievement. He will receive his award and give his address on the last day of the conference in the second Plant Development session.

The Royal Society Te Apārangī Constituent Organisation Forum Day was held in Wellington on 30 Nov, 2016. An update was given on the Society’s Diversity action plan, the recently released and upcoming Facts Sheets and Expert Advice Panels, the plans for their 150 Year Celebration, and the RSNZ branding refresh – resulting in a name and logo change. The Early Career Researchers’ Committee was also introduced. The Biological and Life Sciences forum was held in the afternoon where further discussion was held on the Gene Editing Facts Sheet and suggestions made for future Facts Sheets. There was discussion around emerging issues, where I reported on concerns raised by several of our members regarding New Breeding Technologies, such as Gene Editing, including how/if this technology will be regulated and the importance of NZ in keeping up with the rest of the world in the use of these technologies. The next Forum Day will be held on 20 July, 2017. Please get in touch with me regarding any matters you would like discussed at that meeting.

NZSPB Website

Our website is currently hosted by The Royal Society Te Apārangī. However, they have decided to transfer all websites they host for organisations such as ours to a commercial provider, Prefer. The Royal Society will continue to bear the cost of hosting our website, but it will mean a change to its look, which is a shame considering all the hard work put in by Mike Clearwater to give it a fresh look a few years ago. However, new website facilities available to us will include automatic invoicing for subscriptions and on-line bill payments. We have decided to take up the Royal Society’s offer and will begin migrating the website over in July while trying to maintain as much of our current website’s functionality and look as possible.

Global Plant Council

We continue to be a member of the Global Plant Council (GPC) (www.globalplantcouncil.org), which is an international coalition of 28 societies representing plant, crop, agricultural and environmental sciences. Our membership fees are low reflecting the size of our society. In October the Global Plant Council’s AGM was held in Brisbane as part of ComBio2016. Rainer Hofmann attended on behalf of our Society and reports that discussions were held around GPC initiatives such as DivSeek, Plantae, the GPC Knowledge Exchange, a workshop on Stress Resilience, and participation in the Fascination of Plants Day. They also discussed suggestions for cross-collaborations, outreach, and novel funding sources. As with many research networks and non-profit organizations, securing long term funding for the GPC is a continual challenge. At COMBIO 2016 the GPC hosted a symposium entitled “Addressing Global Challenges in Plant Science: the Importance of Co-operation beyond National Boundaries”. The overarching theme was that global challenges need global solutions, and the roles that GPC and its members can perform in that regard.

Future meetings

As part of our regular three year cycle our next annual meeting will be part of ComBio2018 (23-26 September 2018, in Sydney), where we will meet with the Australian Society of Plant Scientists, NZ and Australian Societies for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and the Australian and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biologists. From 2019 ComBio will become a biannual event, therefore we would look to move from involvement every three years to every four years, if members agree. ComBio gives us a good opportunity to meet with our Australian colleagues from ASPS, but being offshore is not so well attended by our members. A once in four year cycle may suit our society better.

As stated at the start of this report, we hope that Plant Science Central will become a local biannual event for our society working alongside NZIAHS and NZIAPB. Please let me know if you have further ideas regarding future annual meetings.

Secretary position

This year the Society has had to run without a secretary and I have continued with the secretarial duties while hoping that one could be found. Long term, this is not a good position for the Society to be in, so I hope a secretary can be found this year. Please seriously consider if you would like to serve our Society in this way. I have found it to be an excellent and rewarding way to meet with colleagues in the plant science community.

Acknowledgements

Finally, I wish to thank council for their support throughout this first year of my presidency, particularly Mike Clearwater for his assistance as acting Treasurer and getting all overdue subscriptions under control before handing over to David Burritt. Also to Stevie Noe and Samarth for their work on the Webpage and Facebook, respectively, they have done a great job keeping us all up to date with the latest Society happenings. Your help has been greatly appreciated.

Marian McKenzie
President, NZSPB