



New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists

President's Report 2018

It is my pleasure to welcome you to our 40th AGM as an incorporated society. Forty years is a milestone to be proud of and a time to reflect on the efforts of all those currently contributing in such a tangible way to our plant biology community, as well as all those who have gone before us. I would particularly like to mention our Past Presidents who have guided our society through the past forty years: Bernard Ford, David Rook, Roger Field, Peter Minchin, Paula Jameson, David Whitehead, Dennis Greer, Michael Thorpe, Clive Cornford, Mike Trought, Keith Sharrock, Gavin Ross, Michael McManus, Julian Heyes, Matthew Turnbull, Julian Eaton-Rye, Mike Clearwater, Brian Jordan, Rainer Hofmann and Marian McKenzie. I'd also like to acknowledge the work of our past Secretaries/Treasurers: K. Bennett, Jay Mann, Debbie Bertaud, Julian Heyes, Jocelyn Eason, Mike Clearwater, Tina Summerfield, Marian McKenzie and Ranjith Pathirana who have kept the Society ticking along during this time.

This year we are pleased to meet at ComBio2018 at the International Convention Centre, Sydney, with our sister society, the Australian Society of Plant Scientists and alongside the New Zealand and Australian Societies for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, the Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology, and the International Society of Differentiation. We have joined ComBio on a three yearly basis since 2000 and anticipate continuing to do so every four years from now on, as ComBio moves toward becoming a biennial event. The ComBio model gives our members the opportunity to meet with a wider group of colleagues including our Australian counterparts. Being a larger meeting, there are fewer opportunities for our student members to give oral presentations, but hopefully this is made up for by the opportunity to make connections with a wider range of international researchers. Our current commitment to ComBio also allows The Society a share of the conference profits, which is a major source of funds for NZSPB, allowing us to keep our membership fees as low as possible. This is an important consideration for future annual conferences, as our funds have dropped in recent years due in part to our regular participation in the Plant Satellite meetings at Queenstown Research Week. While QRW has become a key fixture on the annual conference calendar, and the Plant Satellites are excellently run meetings that serve the plant biology community well, they do not offer a profit share arrangement for contributing societies.

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 three students to attend ComBio2018. So far we have not been approached for student support to attend any international conferences or for our Technician's Award. Please remember these awards are available and are considered on a case-by-case basis.

This year's recipient of the **Roger Slack Award in Plant Biology** is **Professor Paula Jameson** of The University of Canterbury. Paula has utilised the fundamental knowledge gained from a life-time's research on the cytokinin plant hormone group. The award is presented specifically for her extensive research into the roles of cytokinin in seed and forage development, resulting in 12

publications in the last five years, spanning three research areas. Paula's group has identified the key cytokinin homeostatic elements that could be disrupted to increase seed production while maintaining quality, and has shown that the cytokinins are intimately involved in the re-establishment of carbon/nitrogen status following defoliation of perennial ryegrass. Paula's group has also investigated gene expression in plants infected with the gall-forming bacterium *Rhodococcus fascians*, and has proposed that an interaction between cytokinins, cell wall invertases and the newly identified sugar transporter genes, the SWEETS, contribute to apical dominance loss and the appearance of the multiple shoots in infected pea seeds. It will give me particular pleasure to present Paula with her award on 26th September, at ComBio2018, as she was my own PhD supervisor, a past president of NZSPB (1985-1987), and a constant supporter of our society.

The Michael McManus Award for Best Student Paper is 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. This year the recipient of The Michael McManus Award for Best Student Paper is Liya Mathew, currently of The NZ Institute for Plant and Food Research, for her paper "Cold, antioxidant and osmotic pre-treatments maintain the structural integrity of meristematic cells and improve plant regeneration in cryopreserved kiwifruit shoot tips", which was published in *Protoplasma* in July this year following her MSc research at the University of Otago and The NZ Institute for Plant and Food Research. Congratulations to Liya on her achievement. She will give an address on her research on Monday 24th September at ComBio2018 and will receive her award on Tuesday 25th September at the awards ceremony.

The Royal Society Te Apārangī Constituent Organisation Forum Day has been held twice this year on 8 December 2017 (which I attended) and 27 June (which Ranjith Pathirana attended).

At the December meeting Richard Bedford (President Royal Society Te Apārangī) highlighted the desire to increase diversity within the Royal Society members and awardees, with a particular focus on increasing engagement with women, Māori and Pacifica (at that point only 13% of fellows were women, and less were Māori or Pacifica), this was echoed by Barry Scott, who outlined several approaches Royal Society Te Apārangī are taking to encourage diversity. Andrew Clealand (Chief Executive Royal Society Te Apārangī) updated on the progress on information coming out of the Society on Gene Editing, Climate Change and Human Health, and LED lighting in our cities.

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. The GPC executive is a well-established group who are wanting to serve the Plant Biology community globally. I encourage members to look at the resources on their website, and to consider how the GPC might serve us, they are open to suggestions. The Global Plant Council is holding their 2018 AGM on Saturday 3rd November in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, in association with the ASA CSSA annual meeting, which will take place from 4th - 7th November 2018 at the same location. If you are going to be in the area at this time, please consider attending the meeting on behalf of NZSPB. If you are interested, please contact me for further details.

Future meetings

Another “Plant Science Central” meeting is planned for 2-4 July 2019 and council have indicated our intention to make this our annual meeting for 2019, alongside NZIAHS and NZIAPB. In 2020 the 18th International Congress on Photosynthesis Research is being held in Rotorua (August 2 – 7), which we have been approached by Julian Eaton-Rye to be involved in, there is also the IX International Postharvest Symposium in Rotorua that year (9 – 13 November). In 2021 we have indicated our support for the FAOBMB Congress in Christchurch (22-25 November). Please let the council know if you are aware of any other meetings we should consider in the coming years.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank council for their support throughout the two years of my presidency. I am particularly grateful to Ranjith Pathirana, who has stepped up so ably into the position of Secretary this year, and to Mike Clearwater for his continued assistance as Treasurer. Also to Stevie Noe and Samarth for their continued work on the Webpage and Facebook. Finally, I'm very happy to be handing over the 'presidential reigns' to Richard Macknight, who I know will do an excellent job of leading NZSPB into the coming two years.

Marian McKenzie
President, NZSPB