AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF PLANT SCIENTISTS

2015 ASPS President's Report

John Evans

ASPS promotes the discipline of Plant Science and provides professional contact and networking for plant scientists and University-level educators in Australia. http://www.asps.org.au/ Key objectives of the Society are to:

- Facilitate the dissemination of new research.
- Provide a forum for sharing of knowledge so that the membership can build both the depth and breadth of knowledge of plant functions.
- Provide mutual support and collective mentorship.
- Recognise and reward excellence in plant science research and teaching.
- Nurture the next generation of plant scientists.

ComBio 2015
ASPS works in partnership with other relevant Australian (and New Zealand) Societies to jointly organise the national conference ComBio. In 2015, these societies were: Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, ASPS, Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology, NZSBMB and NZSPB. We are grateful for the efforts of **Ed Newbigin** (University of Melbourne) and **Ros Gleadow** (Monash University) who served as the ASPS Representatives on the ComBio 2015 Organising Committee here in Melbourne.

ASPS Awards to Recognise Excellence (2015)
Congratulations to:

- **Mark Waters** (University of Western Australia) on winning the Peter Goldacre Award for his research on karrikins. Derived from burnt plant matter, karrikins are seed germination stimulants that resemble strigolactone hormones. Dr Waters' research has elucidated early events in karrikin and strigolactone signalling, specifically involving the karrikin receptor protein KAI2. His work has established that KAI2 regulates diverse aspects of the plant life cycle, and may be a receptor for an unknown plant hormone. Evolutionary conservation of KAI2 suggests that KAI2-dependent signalling is a fundamental and ancient process common to all plants.

The Goldacre award recognises research achievement in the past 3 years by an early-career member of the Society (within 10 years of PhD). The Award honours the memory and attainments of Peter Goldacre, a young scientist and foundation member of this Society who was held in great respect by his peers, but passed away from cancer at the early age of 34 (in 1960). The award of a medal plus $2,000 is sponsored by Functional Plant Biology.

- **Jean Finnegan** FAA (CSIRO Agriculture) who delivered the 2015 JG Wood Lecture 'DNA methylation: From Arabidopsis to wheat'.
- **My Linh** (CSIRO, Adelaide) for winning the ASPS-FPB Best Paper Award for an Early-Career Scientist published in Functional Plant Biology in 2014: 41, 1168–1177 Physiological basis of salt stress tolerance in rice expressing the antiapoptotic gene SfIAP, by Thi My Linh Hoang, Brett Williams, Harjeet Khanna, James Dale and Sagadevan G. Mundree, Centre for Tropical Crops and Biocommodities, Queensland University of Technology. The prize includes a personal one-year print+online subscription to FPB, a $250 book voucher from CSIRO PUBLISHING, and a certificate.
- **Alice Burgess** (University of Adelaide) was awarded the R.N. Robertson Travelling Fellowship to visit Professor Dabing Zhang, School of Life Sciences and Biotechnology Shanghai Jiao Tong University in Shanghai, to study: Conservation of RNA methylation and linking to metabolism. Reports from previous winners are available at: http://www.asps.org.au/awards/robertson-fellowship

Unfortunately, there was no ASPS Teaching Award in 2015. The award recognises excellence, innovation and/or contributions to teaching of plant science at University level. Members are encouraged to consider nominations for this important award.

- Professors **Christine Beveridge** (University of Queensland) and **Ian Small** (University of Western Australia) on being elected fellows of the Australian Academy of Sciences.

Phytogen

Phytogen is now a blog and web resource where news and information can be shared. **Gonzalo Estavillo**, with assistance from **Janet Wheeler** and **Tina Offler**, have improved the web-site and use of social media to communicate with members and to further raise the profile of ASPS. Its success and usefulness is up to us.

Plants in Action 2

Plants in Action 2 continues to progress. Eight chapters are now uploaded onto the web. Other chapters currently being worked on are: Nutrient uptake (Susanne Schmidt, Uli Mathesius, Megan Ryan), Growth and Development (Christine Beveridge, Jim Reid), Light Use, Atmospheric CO_2 (David Tissue, Belinda Medlin), Water Stress (Rana Munns), Plan Nutrition (Peter Ryan, Pax Blamey, Hans Lambers), Slainity (Rana Munns, Sergey Shabala). Updates are provided on the ASPS web-site (http://www.asps.org.au/publications/plants-in-action) and the link to the new edition is: http://plantsinaction.science.uq.edu.au – remember to use the purple ones!

We are especially grateful to Rana Munns who has been the driving force behind this important project, with support from Susanne Schmidt and UQ for hosting it.

Functional Plant Biology

ASPS has a special relationship with FPB. We thank FPB/CSIRO Publishing for continuing to sponsor the Goldacre Award and ASPS-FPB Early Career Scientist Best Paper Award. We also thank CSIRO

Publishing Managing Editor, Dr Chris Anderson, for his support for the Society. In addition, several members of ASPS are Associate Editors for FPB or members of the Editorial Advisory Board and many other people act as reviewers – thank you all for your contributions to the peer review process for FPB.

Executive Committee & Administration

ASPS is a lean operation with no secretariat. I thank the Executive Committee for their contributions: Martha Ludwig (Honorary Secretary), Brent Kaiser (Honorary Treasurer), Tim Colmer (Past President). We have had superb support from a diligent **Janet Wheeler** who among other things deals with phantom members who keep appearing on our database. **Gonzalo Estavillo** also needs a special mention for his engagement with social media and continual enthusiasm and ideas of how to improve our society. I also thank all ASPS Discipline Representatives who complete their term this year: http://www.asps.org.au/about/discipline

Thank you also to: (i) Barry Pogson - our representative for 2014 & 2015 on both the GPC and Science Technology Australia; (ii) Ros Gleadow our ASPS representative for 2014 & 2015 on the AAS National Committee for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; (iii) Christine Beveridge our ASPS representative for 2014 & 2015 on the AAS National Committee for Cellular and Developmental Biology. (Information on the AAS National Committees that represent different scientific disciplines is available at: http://science.org.au/natcoms I also thank Janet Wheeler for her help as a casual with the web-site and sending of ASPS e-mail).

Science Meets Parliament

This year Chris Cazzonelli and Margaret Barbour attended this event organised by Science & technology Australia. It provides insight into journalism, political life and a brief opportunity to exchange directly with a politician. If you are interested in participating in this event, please let the ASPS secretary know.

John Evans

President, Australian Society of Plant Scientists

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