2026 President's Report

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF PLANT SCIENTISTS

Prof Brent N. Kaiser

Annual Meetings

The 2026 ASPS annual meeting will be part of COMBIO 2026, held between 28 September – Oct 1 in Sydney. The meeting has been developed by the local organising committee led by Associate Professor Tom Roberts (USYD) and Dr. Vanessa Melino (Newcastle University). We have an exciting agenda this year of talented plant scientists from across the country and from abroad, including keynote lectures from:

1) Professor Monika Chodasiewicz (KAUST)
2) Dr Renee Marchin Prokopavicus (Peter Goldacre, WSU)
3) Dr. Vanessa Melino (Jan Anderson Award, Newcastle University)
4) Dr Qi Shen (Annals of Botany, Peking University)
5) Professor Barry Pogson (JG Wood Award, ANU)

The local team has done an excellent job assembling a dynamic program complemented by the darling Harbour City backdrop.

Attendance this year has struggled to keep pace with last year's event in Adelaide. I expect the cost of travel in 2026 is getting prohibitive, early timing in Sept/Oct and possibly a return to the COMBIO format may be keeping people away this year. Nevertheless, the meeting should be an excellent opportunity to re-connect with your APS colleagues in a wonderful setting in Darling Harbour.

The Treasurer, Dr Joseph Pegler and Secretary Associate Professor Mary Byrne, have worked closely with the local organizing team to support student travel allowances and to provide oversight of the many ASPS awards that will be presented during the meeting.

Our next annual meeting will be a distributed hybrid event as run previously in 2024. We have host universities from each state currently organizing next years event, which will occur on **November 18, 2027**. This meeting will be followed by **ComBio 2028 in Melbourne**, and the next combined **ASPS meeting (2029)**, where **Perth (UWA)** has been nominated.

Another exciting opportunity currently being explored is a potential Australian bid to host the **International Botanical Congress (IBC) in 2035**. There is strong interest in developing a bid, together with support from the NSW Government, and I have suggested that ASPS could play an active role as part of the organising team.

Discussions are now extending to other plant-based societies across Australia to gauge support from the broader botany and plant biology community and to explore what a genuinely national bid might look like. Australia last hosted the IBC in Melbourne in 2011, and bringing the Congress back in 2035 would provide an outstanding opportunity to showcase Australian plant science, our unique flora and ecosystems, and the strength and diversity of our plant research community to an international audience.

There is still considerable work to be done before any bid takes shape, but it is an opportunity I believe ASPS should actively explore with our colleagues across the Australian plant science community.

Governance

The Society has been exploring possible changes to its governance, particularly the organisation and composition of the Executive. The communication and archiving of ASPS activities, mandates, meetings and memberships increasingly require a dedicated **Communications Officer**. Our public image and how we present ourselves to the broader community are critical to the long-term success and relevance of the Society, especially in attracting and engaging new generations of plant scientists.

We are therefore proposing that a Communications Officer be created as an ASPS Executive-level position. This role will be responsible for the Society's communication, advertising and social engagement with members and prospective members. The Communications Officer will also chair ASPS's Communications Committee, which provides guidance on our social media presence and the protection and development of our society's brand. At the 2026 Annual General Meeting, we will seek approval from the membership for the Communications Officer role to be activated and incorporated into the ASPS Executive from 2027.

We have also undertaken the on-going review of the current Executive membership and disciplinary leadership positions for 2026. Next year will see the appointment of a new President, as I conclude my tenor as President (ASPS) at the end of 2026. Professor Christine Beveredge (President Elect 2026) will take over the Presidents role in 2027 for a 2-year period. Prof Brent Kaiser will continue as Past-President in 2027. Several disciplinary lead roles will also be refreshed as current incumbents complete their terms. Nominations have been circulated across the membership to attract new colleagues into these important positions. Each of these roles and nominations will be tabled at the ASPS AGM 2026 in Sydney for review and member voting.

Society Overtures

As President, I continue to be in contact with other plant science-related societies to explore potential partnerships that would enable members of each society to participate more easily in annual conferences and regional meetings. Approaches have been made to the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB), the Australasian Society for Phycology and Aquatic Botany (ASPAB), the Australian Wheat Breeding Society (AWBS) the Genetics Society and the Japanese Society of Plant

Physiologists. Progress towards enacted joint MOU's has been slow but progress continues to lock in these societies as future partners of ASPS. Our intention is to develop these partnerships further in 2026 so that they can be activated by 2027/28, if not earlier.

ASPS Annual Awards

A core responsibility of the ASPS Executive is to identify and recognise outstanding members through the Society's awards program. The 2026 ASPS award recipients are:

- Prof Barry Pogson – JG Wood Lecture
- Dr. Renée Marchin Prokopavicius – Peter Goldacre Award
- Dr Vanessa Melino - Jan Anderson Award
- Associate Professor Claudia Keitel - Education and Outreach Award
- Dr Aayshree Kharel - Functional Plant Biology Best Paper Award
- Dr Qi Shen - Annals of Botany Lectureship
- Marie-Emma Denaire & Madhoolika Karunakaram - RN Robertson Travel Award

A President's reflection – 2 years on

I have enjoyed my second year as ASPS President. ASPS has been a constant throughout my plant science career since I first became involved in 1995, when the Society was primarily a plant physiology community. Over the past 31 years, I have had the privilege of serving as a disciplinary theme leader, Treasurer and now President. It has been rewarding to see the Society evolve while retaining the sense of community that first drew me to ASPS.

ASPS continues to play an important role in supporting Australian plant science. Its strength lies in bringing people together to exchange ideas, discuss discoveries, build collaborations and provide a sounding board for our science. In an increasingly diverse and multidisciplinary research environment, that community remains enormously valuable.

We are also seeing a generational shift within ASPS. Many long-standing members who helped build the Society are retiring or approaching retirement, while a growing cohort of students and early-career researchers is becoming actively involved. We currently have 338 paid members which includes 180 student members. We need to expand our ordinary membership and ensure the student members transition to ordinary memberships as they move on from their studies. It will be important that we ensure these members see ASPS as their main Society and have opportunities to shape its future.

A major achievement this year has been the redevelopment of the ASPS website and membership platform, an area that has challenged the Society for many years. Managing an up to date website

and responding to the continual digital changes in society necessitated the re-build. The new platform should make membership easier to manage, maintain a more accurate membership database (who are we?) and improve communication across our community. Please check it out when released in full later this year.

Looking towards 2027 and beyond, there is still plenty to do. As mentioned earlier, we need to bed down the new website and ensure it works effectively for our members. We also need to grow and diversify our membership, encourage greater participation from our more experienced members, and continue to showcase the quality, breadth and impact of Australian plant science.

As a Society, we also need to continue supporting one another and advocating strongly for plant science research. This includes supporting research initiatives, strengthening collaborations, and contributing constructively to grant assessment and review processes. Maintaining a strong and visible plant science community is critical to ensuring that our disciplines remain competitive for research investment through programs such as the ARC and the relative Research and Development Corporations.

I encourage all ASPS members to look for opportunities to support and promote the excellent plant science being undertaken across Australia. Where appropriate, build new collaborations, connect colleagues with complementary expertise, and create opportunities for greater participation across the ASPS community. Our collective success will ultimately depend on the strength of our community and our willingness to support one another.

Above all, we need to keep ASPS a strong, connected and relevant home for the Australian plant science community.