ASPS President's Annual Report 2011

Importance of plant sciences: As a rule, people are more fascinated by animals and human health than plants, making it challenging to attract students in large enough numbers to support large academic departments in the plant sciences. We only have to look at ancient cave paintings to realise that there is nothing new in focussing more on animals than plants. Nevertheless, the answers to supplying the food, fibre and fuel needs of 9 billion people without massive environmental degradation do lie, to a large extent, in plants. The recent article by Grierson et al. (New Phyt. 192:6-12, 2011) listing 100 important questions for the plant sciences demonstrates the limitations to our current knowledge, and identifies important areas for future research. We will only be able to address these with a concentrated research program, good funding, employing the brightest minds. The Global Plant Council has been created to help put plant research and education on the world stage. The American Society of Plant Biologists is holding a summit on plant research to develop strategic approaches. Next year the two main European plant societies (FESPB and the more agriculturally oriented EPSO) are holding a combined meeting with a view to presenting a united front. Within Australia we need to move plant science up the agenda. We need to continue to build links with like-minded societies. We do this each year at ComBio with the ASBMB and ANZSCDB, and with the New Zealand Plant Physiologists every 3 years. Next year in Adelaide the Plant Pathologists will join us as well. Now is the time for an active and healthy professional society

Conferences and prizes: Last year's OzBio2010 in Melbourne was a larger meeting, combined as it was with several international biochemical societies. Our own ASPS dinner was well attended and we thank the students from Monash who organised this. This year has been a big year already with the International Botanical Congress in Melbourne. Thank you especially to all the symposia and theme chairs, and Anna Koltunow particularly for all her work to make it a success. For the current ComBio2011, I want to thank Graham Bonnett and Susanne Schmidt for representing ASPS on the program committee and Jim Burnell for heading the organising committee. Congratulations also to all our prizewinners. The winner of the Goldacre award is Dr Chanyarat Paungfoo-Lonhienne (UQ), the ASPS Teaching Award is Dr Gonzalo Martín Estavillo (ANU) and the FPB Best Paper goes to Dr Helen Bramley (UWA). This year's JG Wood lecture is to be delivered by Prof Susanne von Caemmerer (ANU).

Communication is a core activity for the ASPS. Phytogen has had an excellent series of articles this year. I would like to thank Tina Offler for her work as editor and to all of you who contributed. I am pleased to announce that Tina has agreed to stay on for another year. One aim of my periodic President Updates is to increase the sense of community amongst plant scientists. We have a good number of student members, but once they graduate, and lose their institutional email accounts, it is hard to keep in touch. In order to better connect with the newest generation of plant scientists I have set up a FaceBook page (Australian Society of Plant Scientists) and a Twitter account (ASPS_Ozplants, #ozplants). Regular announcements are made using these platforms as it is much simpler than email. Members are able to post things on the ASPS FaceBook wall as well. I am hoping that this will promote networking amongst our younger members especially, as they move around the world.

Education. Good education is a fundamental first step in promoting plant science in Australia. Plants in Action 1 is now available through our website, free of charge. It has even been translated into Belarusian. A link to the Belarus translation is available on our FaceBook page. Plants in Action 2 is underway with Rana Munns as Editor. It was hoped to launch it this week but not enough chapters are complete (*mea culpa*). Susanne Schmidt has also been working very hard on this. For further details please contact Susanne or Rana.

Functional Plant Biology. We continue our special relationship with FPB. Rana Munns has been reappointed as Editor-in-Chief for a further two years (March 2011-March 2013). Submission and peer review work flows are now managed in ScholarOne Manuscripts. Professor Achim Walter, Dr Peter Solomon and Dr Lucas Cernusak have joined the Editorial Board in 2011. This year FPB has published a Special Issue (Actinorhizal Plants) and a Research Front (Root Systems for Dry Environments). We thank FPB/CSIRO Publishing for continuing to sponsor the Goldacre Award and

Best Paper Award. We also thank Managing Editor Dr Chris Anderson for his support for the society this past year (e.g. allowing us to use the CSIRO Booth at IBC to distribute information about the Society). Updates to the PrometheusWiki can be found on FaceBook.

Council, Executive and Administrative changes

ASPS is a lean operation with no secretariat. Last year Jen Price (CSIRO) started working on a casual basis as an executive assistant to then President Rana Munns. Jen has decided to focus on her work with Plants in Action rather than on general ASPS admin. I want to thank Jen for her help during the past year, especially in getting the membership email reminders out and starting an update of our website and associated forms. It is my pleasure to welcome student member Rob Shepherd as executive assistant. Rob is now sending out the emails and handling the advertisements. The advertising opportunities offered through the society are appreciated by most of us. For the past three years Kiran Sarfaraz (CSIRO) has handled these. We thank Kiran for doing this with such efficiency and wish her well as she moves on to other things.

The executive consists of the President, Secretary, Treasurer, and the past President or President-elect (depending on the point in the cycle). We meet by phone approx. every month, and face to face a few a times a year. I want to thank the current executive for their efforts this year. It is with much sadness that we lose John Evans (Hon sec) and Rana Munns (past President) from their official roles on the executive. John and Rana have served the society in various capacities over many years. Their experience, together with that of past Treasurer Tony Ashton, has been extremely valuable to the new executive members. There is a real danger with a society such as ours that knowledge about the society can get lost with the turnover on the executive and the council. While much of the information is on the Website, you need to know where it is, and when things need to be done by. It is for this reason I am pleased to announce that I Rob Shepherd will create a repository of knowledge, forms and a perpetual calendar that will persist beyond individuals. We are setting up a Google Calendar that will trigger emails to the generic president, treasurer etc. accounts on certain dates to make sure that notification of meetings, advertising of society awards and so on continue to be made in a timely manner.

Thank you also to Helen Irving for her work as Treasurer. I look forward to working with her for another year. Sponsoring students to travel to ComBio and providing seeding money or loans for conferences is important in meeting our brief of promoting plant science in Australia. Thank you to Helen, Rana and John who have been working out how we can be more consistent about the way we award these and the Robertson Awards and respond to requests to support conferences in Australia. It has become clear that we do need a bit more money to do this and I encourage you to support the modest increase in fees proposed by Helen Irving.

Finally, I would like to thank all the current, outgoing and incoming councillors for supporting ASPS and their readiness to help and and members of the supporting subcommittees, Barry Pogson (STA representative) and Marilyn Ball who has been our Public Officer for many year (the role relates to our registration as a legal entity in the ACT). Thank you to John Evans over from Marilyn.The council meets annually at ComBio. Earlier this year we had a phone-in meeting as well. I would like to see the Council play a more prominent role in the society and to make the virtual meetings more regular. I will also be asking the discipline reps to contact the members in their area, and ask if people would be interested in acting as mentors or to be mentored. We are all busy, so it is important that this not be onerous. The simplest system would be for the mentor and mentee (assigned by the Rep) to meet once a year –probably at ComBio, or perhaps a specialist conference. The mentor could take the opportunity to introduce the younger member to other researchers and keynote speakers, and give them a few tips on how to get the most of the networking opportunities offered by conferences. Hopefully, this will be in place for 2012. Best wishes for the year ahead and happy researching.



Assoc/Prof Ros Gleadow, Cairns, September 2011