AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY
OF PLANT SCIENTISTS

2014 President's Report

Tim Colmer

Background

The Australian Society of Plant Scientists (ASPS) promotes the discipline of Plant Science and provides professional contact and networking for plant scientists and University-level educators in Australia. Information on ASPS is available at: 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.

ASPS works in partnership with other relevant Australian (and New Zealand) Societies to jointly organise the national conference ComBio (for 2014: Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology & Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology). The ComBio conference is one of the activities by which ASPS delivers several of the Society's objectives to the membership. Other activities are described below and/or are listed on the ASPS web-site.

ComBio 2014

The ASPS representatives on the 2014 Organising Committee were Ulrike Mathesius (ANU) and Yong-Ling Ruan (University of Newcastle). On behalf of ASPS I thank Uli and Yong-Ling for all their work to make ComBio 2014 such a success. Sally Jay and her team, as well as the Committee Members from the partner Societies, are also thanked. The symposium chairs, invited international Plenary Speakers, presenters that delivered Society Award Lectures (see below), all other speakers, poster presenters and all attendees, are thanked for their contributions and participation.

ComBio 2015

ComBio 2015 will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Melbourne, 27 September to 1 October. I thank Ed Newbigin (University of Melbourne) and Ros Gleadow (Monash University) for serving as the ASPS Representatives on the ComBio 2015 Organising Committee. Ed is the Deputy Convenor of the Conference, with Marie Bogoyevitch (ASBMB & University of Melbourne) as the Convenor. The provisional plant streams (i.e. organised by ASPS) are: Plant Cell Biology and Plant Ecophysiology.

Other ASPS supported Conferences and Workshops during the past 12 months

- The 6th Asia and Oceania Conference on Photobiology 2013 was held in Sydney, 10-13 November, 2013. The Conference was co-chaired by Scott Byrne and Min Chen (both The University of Sydney). Further details at: http://www.aocp2013.org.au/ ASPS provided seed funds of $2,500 – and the conference was very successful so these funds have been returned to the Society. The co-chairs noted: "The seed fund of $2,500 was very important for us. We thank ASPS and the success of the conferences means we can return these funds". In addition, a small surplus from the conference was also sent to ASPS – with a proposal to support one PhD Student and one ECR travel grant (open to all ASPS members, to be awarded on a competitive basis) to the next Photobiology Conference in Taiwan 2015 (to be discussed during the AGM).

• All members are reminded of the availability of seed funding from ASPS for relevant plant conferences – this is also an important way that ASPS promotes plant science in Australia and benefits groups of members. Please contact the ASPS Secretary for further information.

ASPS Awards to Recognise Excellence (2014)

Congratulations to:

• **Brett Ferguson (University of Queensland)** on winning the Peter Goldacre Award for his research *'Discovery of new factors involved in the development and autoregulation of legume nodules'*. This 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.

• **Marilyn Ball** (Australian National University) for being selected to deliver the 2014 R.N. Robertson Lecture *'A salty tale: the ups and downs of water use in mangroves'*. The RN Robertson Lecture occurs every second year, alternating with the JG Wood Lecture. Sir Rutherford N (Bob) Robertson was our second President in 1958. In recognition of his formative influence on plant science in Australia, the Society began the biennial 'Robertson Lectures' in 1994. 'Sir Bob' was an inspiration to Australian plant scientists both young and old. A biographical memoir of 'Sir Bob' is available on the ASPS web-site.

• **Christine Böttcher** (CSIRO, Adelaide) for winning the ASPS-FPB Best Paper Award for an Early-Career Scientist published in Functional Plant Biology in 2013. The prize includes a personal one-year print+online subscription to FPB, a $250 book voucher from CSIRO PUBLISHING, and a certificate. The award-winning paper was: *Böttcher et al. (2013). Ripening of grape berries can be advanced or delayed by reagents that either reduce or increase ethylene levels. Functional Plant Biology 40(6):566-581.*

• **Stephanie Watts-Williams** (Monash University) won the R.N. Robertson Travelling Fellowship to visit Prof. Matthias Wissuwa at the JIRCAS (Tsukuba, Japan) in mid-2014, for her project: *What role do arbuscular mycorrhizas and other soil microbes have in rice P-uptake efficiency?* Stephanie's report, as well as reports from previous winners, is available at: http://www.asps.org.au/awards/robertson-fellowship

• There was no ASPS Teaching Award in 2014. 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 for 2015.

• Winners (3 students) of Student Poster Prizes at ComBio 2014 (announced at the closing ceremony).

• Recipients (26 students) of 2014 ASPS ComBio Student Travel Awards.

ASPS Communication

Phytogen (our newsletter) is a historically important avenue of communication within the Society. We are very grateful to Tina Offler for again being the Phytogen editor in 2014 – which was (during the second half of 2014) a year of transition to a new format using the ASPS web-site (thanks to Janet Wheeler) and FaceBook and Twitter to communicate with members (thanks to Gonzalo Estavillo). Tina will step down as Phytogen editor after many years of service; on behalf of ASPS members I thank you Tina. Tina will kindly provide advice and help to the new Phytogen/Web editor – which is highly appreciated as a small team/sub-committee will work under the leadership of Gonzalo Estavillo (with assistance from Janet Wheeler) to further improve the web-site and use of social media to communicate with members and to further raise the profile of ASPS.

Plants in Action 2

Progress on Plants in Action 2 has been gaining momentum, with six chapters now uploaded onto the web. Three other chapters are in the final stages of being completed. 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

Rana Munns has been the driving force behind this important project, with support from Susanne Schmidt; thank you Rana and Susanne. Thank you also to authors of chapters and especially to the

chapter coordinators (i.e. lead authors/chapter editors). ASPS members have also helped by reviewing the submitted chapters.

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. Rana Munns stepped down as Editor-in-Chief in April 2014, with the appointment of Sergey Shabala as the new Editor-in-Chief. Thank you Rana for your work over the years. Congratulations to Sergey for his appointment.

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), John Evans (President-elect). I also thank all ASPS Discipline Representatives; for the current list see: http://www.asps.org.au/about/discipline

Thank you also to: (i) John Evans - our Public Officer (the role relates to our registration as a legal entity in the ACT); (ii) Barry Pogson - our representative for 2014 & 2015 on both the GPC and Science Technology Australia; (iii) Ros Gleadow our ASPS representative for 2014 & 2015 on the AAS National Committee for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; (iv) 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).

ASPS – a Progressive & Inclusive Society for Australian Plant Scientists

ASPS promotes plant sciences in Australia and provides professional opportunities (e.g. conferences, lectures, workshops, teaching resources, awards for excellence in research and teaching, conference travel awards for postgraduate students, research collaboration travel award for a postgraduate student). ASPS plays a key role to enhance opportunities for early-career plant scientists in Australia and to enhance networks of our members in Australia and beyond. ComBio, our annual scientific meeting in collaboration with other Societies, is a key activity of the Society. ASPS supports, and members organise, various other workshops and scientific meetings.

All members are thanked for their support to continue the tradition and good functioning of our inclusive Society, which is of importance for the continued strength and excellence of plant science in Australia. Feedback and suggestions to the Executive Committee and Discipline Representative is welcome.

Lastly, I thank members, discipline representatives and the executive group for their help and support during my tenure as President. I warmly welcome John Evans as President-elect and look forward to continuing to work as immediate Past-president with John, Martha & Brent in 2015.

Tim Colmer, President of ASPS
September 2014