WSCS – ASPS Council Report 2025

Contents: Social Media, Phytogen, new ASPS website

WSCS team: Scott Boden, Janet Wheeler, Beth Loveys, Frances Sussmilch, Caitlin Byrt, Alison Bentley, Razlin Azman, Francine Perrine-Walker and Lucas Auroux.

2025-2026 Phytogen team: Lucas Auroux, Razlin Azmam and Janet Wheeler.

2025-2026 Social media team: Lucas Auroux (Social media calendar, LinkedIn, X, Bsky), Razlin Azmam (Facebook, X) and Francine Perrine-Walker (LinkedIn).

WSCS structure and membership

The committee has decided to adjust our meeting schedule to 4–5 meetings per year, recognising that monthly meetings place an undue burden on members' already busy schedules. We will invite a new student representative to join the committee because Lucas will be submitting in June, and we would like to arrange a handover period, recognising the excellent contributions Lucas has made to the committee.

ASPS Social Media

In 2025, the ASPS social media team executed a strategic transition (decided by the WCSC) across social media platforms while maintaining strong engagement with members and the broader plant science community.

Platform Strategy and Growth:

LinkedIn emerged as our primary platform, growing to 800 followers. This professional network proved highly effective for sharing research achievements, career opportunities, and conference announcements, aligning well with our membership's professional development focus.

BlueSky was established as our secondary platform with 300 followers following @asps-oz.bsky.social. This growing platform attracted engaged plant scientists seeking alternatives to X, and we actively promoted it throughout Phytogen editions.

X (formerly Twitter) @asps_ozplants maintained 2.7k followers but transitioned to a reduced-engagement model. We continued posting content for members still using the platform but focused growth efforts elsewhere. The ASPS member list on X remained.

Facebook was decommissioned in 2025 as announced in the July Phytogen edition, consolidating our efforts on LinkedIn and BlueSky.

Content Strategy:

Implemented structured social media calendar coordinating with:

- Monthly Phytogen releases (11 editions)
- Conference promotion (May-November continuous coverage)
- Award announcements and winner profiles
- Student Travel Award recipients (41 awardees across all states)
- Young Tall Poppy Science Award winners (4 plant scientists)
- Science Meets Parliament delegate updates
- Discipline representative contributions

- Research paper highlights from members

Content utilized consistent hashtags #AusPlantSci and #ASPS2025 for conference-related posts.

Monthly Social Media Operations:

Each month, content was strategically scheduled around Phytogen release dates, creating a coordinated communication cycle. The social media calendar included pre-release teasers highlighting featured contributors, release day announcements with key article summaries, and follow-up posts spotlighting individual sections (award winners, student contributions, discipline representative research). Conference-related content intensified from May onwards with weekly updates on registration deadlines, speaker announcements, social events, and volunteer opportunities. Between editions, we amplified member research publications, shared relevant job postings, promoted external events (Global Plant Council webinars, Journal of Experimental Biology symposium), and highlighted achievements within the Australian plant science community.

Conference Social Media Coordination:

Successfully coordinated social media coverage during ASPS 2025 Conference (24-27 November, Adelaide) with photography volunteers and real-time updates across platforms. Promoted volunteer photographer opportunities through Phytogen and direct outreach.

Member Engagement:

Updated membership forms to capture LinkedIn and BlueSky handles alongside legacy X handles, facilitating member connections across platforms. Continued encouraging members to tag ASPS accounts to amplify their Australian plant science research, publications, and career achievements.

Integration with Communications:

Social media content cross-promoted with Phytogen newsletter, creating cohesive messaging. All Phytogen contributions (discipline representatives, student spotlights, award winners) received social media amplification. Dr. Francine Perrine-Walker joined Communications & Website sub-committee and manages the Society's LinkedIn page.

Looking Forward:

The strategic platform transition positions ASPS well for sustained engagement with current and emerging plant scientists. LinkedIn and BlueSky provide professional, research-focused environments aligned with member needs and society goals.

ASPS Phytogen

Razlin Azman and Lucas Auroux continued as Phytogen co-editors throughout 2025, with ongoing support from Janet Wheeler. The newsletter successfully delivered 11 monthly editions (January through November 2025), maintaining consistent quality and engagement with the ASPS community. The December edition will also be delivered before the end of the year.

Content Highlights by Edition:

January 2025: Introduced new student representatives (Alexandra Cunningham-SA, Chamika Ratnayake-QLD, Lucas Auroux-VIC) and featured reports from 2024 conference award winners of across all state nodes.

February 2025: Welcomed Prof. Brent Kaiser as new ASPS President with farewell tribute to Prof. Martha Ludwig. Announced opening of prestigious award applications (Jan Anderson, Peter Goldacre, Teaching and Outreach, RN Robertson Travelling Fellowship). Featured student contribution from Francis Kuang (University of Melbourne).

March 2025: Special issue "Women Shaping the Future of Plant Science in Australia" guest-edited by Beth Loveys and Alison Bentley. Featured conversations between early-career and established researchers, research profiles, and promoted upcoming Global Plant Council webinar featuring Prof. Danielle Way (ANU).

April 2025: Science Meets Parliament 2025 reports from Dr. Nipuni Peththa Thanthrige and Dr. Ashley Jones. Highlighted ASPS partnership with Functional Plant Biology. Featured contributions from Dr. Dugald Reid (Whole Plants Rep) on Victorian ASPS events and Dr. Francine Perrine-Walker. Student contribution from Suyan Yee (ANU).

May 2025: Message from President Brent Kaiser outlining vision for Society. Introduction of Dr. Lim Chee Liew as Cell Biology Discipline Representative. Conference 2025 session lineup announced. E/MCR contribution from Dr. Francine Perrine-Walker. Promoted Journal of Experimental Biology 75th Anniversary Symposium.

June 2025: Travel awards announcement for ASPS 2025 Conference. Updated conference program with 11 specialized sessions. Student spotlight: Alice Temara (ANU). Education Representative contribution from Dr. Robert Sharwood on climate-resilient crops through photosynthesis research.

July 2025: First edition using new ASPS website. Conference registration and abstract submission opening announced. Functional Plant Biology seeking Social Media Editors. Social media transition announced (phasing out X, prioritizing LinkedIn and BlueSky).

August 2025: Environmental Ecophysiology Representative Dr. Kristine Crous featured with in-situ leaf warming experiments in tropical rainforest. Conference early bird registration deadline and social events detailed. Call for student contributions emphasized as both co-editors still struggle to receive any proper student engament.

September 2025: Security alert regarding conference-related phishing activities. Registration/abstract deadline reminders (3 October 2025). Featured Dr. Nipuni Peththa Thanthrige (Genetics & Molecular Biology Rep) on antimalarial peptides in plants. Student contributions from Chamilka Ratnayake and Juel Datta (QLD). Update from Honorary Treasurer Mark Waters. Announced 41 Student Travel Award recipients across all states. Invited contribution from Prof. Sigfredo Fuentes on ARC Centre of Excellence in Plants for Space.

October 2025: Announced 2025 ASPS award winners (Stephanie Watts-Fawkes, Michelle Watt, Yin Liu, Lena Müller). Final conference call with program details. Featured four Young Tall Poppy Science Award winners (Dr. Ali Bajwa, Dr. Fatima Naim, Dr. Ashley Jones, Dr. James Lloyd) with detailed profiles. Contribution from Sunita Ramesh (Diversity & Inclusion Rep). Student contributions from Katie Schleyer, Alexandra Cunningham, and Alistair Hockey. R.N. Robertson Travelling Fellowship report from Callum Hayes. Women in Plant Science Breakfast announced.

November 2025: Final pre-conference edition featuring award winner spotlights with abstracts (Stephanie Watts-Fawkes, Michelle Watt, Lena Müller, Yin Liu). Plant-Microbe Interactions Representative Dr. Ronan Broad introduced with research on CRISPR genome editing in legumes for enhanced nitrogen fixation. Conference volunteer opportunities, social activities updates, and final logistics.

Key Achievements:

- **Discipline Representative Engagement**: Successfully featured contributions from 8 different discipline representatives throughout the year, strengthening connection between specialized research areas and broader membership.
- **Student Representation**: Launched dedicated student contribution section with 12 student features across the year, significantly increasing student visibility and engagement despite limited support from student representative positions.
- **Award Integration**: Comprehensive coverage of all ASPS awards including winner announcements, application processes, and detailed profiles with research abstracts.
- **Special Issues**: Delivered highly successful Women in Plant Science special issue (March) with guest editors, demonstrating capacity for themed content.
- **Conference Support**: Provided continuous conference promotion from May through November, including logistics, volunteer recruitment, award announcements, and speaker profiles.

- **Diverse Content**: Balanced research profiles, fellowship reports, career advice, discipline updates, student spotlights, and society announcements across all editions.

Distribution and Engagement:

Phytogen continued to be distributed via email to all ASPS members and featured on social media platforms (LinkedIn, BlueSky, transitioning away from X). Content was designed for cross-promotion, with contributions also shared on ASPS social media channels using #AusPlantSci and #ASPS2025 hashtags.

Collaboration Highlights:

- Partnership with Functional Plant Biology emphasized through dedicated section (April edition)
- Collaboration with Communications & Website sub-committee (welcomed Dr. Francine Perrine-Walker)
- Integration with new ASPS website development (requested member photo contributions)
- Support for major ASPS initiatives including Science Meets Parliament representation, conference organization, and award programs

Looking Forward:

The editors continue to welcome contributions from students, EMCRs, and established researchers. The successful Women in Science theme collaboration with Alison Bentley and Beth Loveys (early 2025) has strengthened Phytogen with enhanced content structure and better student engagement. Plans include more structured thematic issues, alignment with major plant science events, and increased input from the WCSC.

Acknowledgements: The editors express gratitude to Janet Wheeler for unwavering support, all discipline representatives for timely contributions, student representatives, award winners, fellowship recipients, and the ASPS Conference 2025 organizing committee, especially its Chair Dr. Crystal Sweetman.

ASPS website launched

The new ASPS website was launched this year. In the past year we have posted 10 jobs on our employment page.

14,000 visits total since the launched with ~5,000 per month.

Current ASPS membership

Membership type	**Number of members**
Ordinary membership 1 year*	32
Ordinary membership 2 years*	25
Ordinary membership 4 years*	62
Student membership 2 years*	158
Retired	13
Life	15
Corresponding	18
Honorary (reciprocal Societies)	2
Sustaining*	0
Current financial members*	**277**

Draft 2026 Phytogen calendar

	Exec contributions	Committee contributions	WCSC contributions	Student contributions	Phytogen related	Various items
December 2025			Reflection of local conference	Yes, to find.		
January 2026		President's welcome		Yes, to find.	Welcome to new President elect?	New life and corresponding member profiles?
February 2026		Awards opening	Call for Jan Anderson and Goldacre, Teaching and outreach Award applications Welcome to new WCSC reps	Yes, to find.		Send reminder for Committee Contribution
March 2026		SPECIAL ISSUE Women in Plant Sciences		Yes, to find.		
April 2026		Whole Plants Rep	Report SMP 2026. call for nominees for 2027 SMP.	Yes, to find.		
May 2026	Exec contribution 1/2	Cell Biology Rep	Fascination in Plants Day Reminder Adelaide. Report SMP 2025.	Yes, to find.		

			call for nominees for 2026 SMP.			
June 2026		Education rep	Reminder COMBIO	Yes, to find.		
July 2026		Development Rep	Reminder COMBIO	Yes, to find.		
August 2026		Environmental & Ecophysiology Rep	Reminder COMBIO	Yes, to find.		
September 2026 **(COMBIO)**		Genetics & Molecular Biology Rep	Reminder COMBIO	Yes, to find.		
October 2026	Exec contribution 2/2	Inclusion rep	.	Yes, to find.	Poster and oral student winners + Reflections of the conference	
November 2026		Plant-Microbe Interactions rep (Ronan)		Yes, to find.		Welcome to new discipline/student reps.
December 2026				Poster/presentation winner reports		Welcome to new President elect new discipline/student rep.