AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF PLANT SCIENTISTS

*2018 President’s Report*

# Sergey Shabala

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/](http://www.asps.org.au/%20) .

The 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 turned 60 this year

The Australian Society of Plant Scientists was founded on 19 August 1958 during an inaugural meeting at the University of Adelaide, so we have just turned 60 this year. That early enthusiasm and a prevailing commitment to greater understanding of plant function remains undiminished and, with many talented young members joining us, the Society has no intentions of slowing down.

As a part of the “celebration party” Janet Wheeler and Georgia Koerber have organized a series of six Phytogen blogs each 10 days in the 60 day lead up to ComBio2018, to celebrate each decade of ASPS in each blog. Many thanks to Janet and Georgia, and also to all people who have contributed to these blogs.

To commemorate this milestone and celebrate our achievements, Functional Plant Biology will publish a special issue dedicated to ASPS. Our new President-Elect Kathleen Soole has kindly agree to act as a guest editor for this volume so please be prepared that she may approach you, with a request to contribute.

Society meetings

**COMBIO** **2018**. The COMBIO conference is one of the activities by which ASPS has delivered several of the Society’s objectives to the membership over the last 20 plus years. COMBIO meetings are organized by ASPS in a partnership with other relevant societies – specifically, with the Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) & Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology (ANZSCDB). We are grateful to all COMBIO 2018 committee members (Committee Chair – Liz Harry; Program Chair- Annemiek Beverdam; Deputy Program Chair - Brent Kaiser) and also to ASPS members who were involved in coordination of various plant-related streams (specifically to Brent Kaiser and Margaret Barbour), for their efforts in making this meeting a great success. We also thanks Sally Jay and her team for taking care of all logistics.

**2019 ASPS meeting**. The Sydney 2018 COMBIO will be last annual COMBIO meeting, and from now it will be run as a combined meeting every 2 years instead. Thus, in 2019 ASPS will hold a separate (smaller-scale) meeting on our own. The meeting will be hosted by La Trobe University on Nov 26-29. On 26th, there will be the students only session, and from 27th we meeting will continue in a traditional format. We expect about 150 people in attendance, and would like to encourage you to come. For more details, please contact Kim Johnson who has kindly agreed to take a leading role in organizing this meeting.

**Meetings beyond 2019**. The 2020 meeting will be held in Melbourne on Sept 29- Oct 2 in a Combio format. Please keep your eyes on ASPS website for more details. The meeting in 2021 is not decided but most likely will occur around IPMB meeting in Cairns (see below) in October. For meetings beyond that date, we are looking for volunteers from ASPS to take a lead and come with some suggestions for the suitable dates and location.

**Other conferences**. In the last 12 months, ASPS has supported several bids for the major international meetings to be held in Australia:

* A bid to host the International Congress on Photobiology in Perth in 2024. This congress (http://iuphotobiology.org/previous\_iupb\_meetings) is run by the International Union of Photobiology, and is next due to be held in August 2019 in Barcelona. It brings together researchers interested in learning more about the effects of sunlight on biological and chemical processes in humans, plants and the environment as well as harnessing sunlight for technological advancement. This initiative is also supported by the Molecular & Experimental Pathology Society of Australasia (MEPSA). The Perth-based bid committee group, consisting with members of the ASPS and MEPSA has been awarded a small grant (The Aspire Award, https://www.pcb.com.au/aspire/telethon-kids-institute/) from the Perth Convention Bureau and City of Perth to attend this congress in 2019, and put in a pitch for this conference to come to Perth. Dr Shelley Gorman from Telethon Kids Institute at WA is leading this bid.
* Last year ASPS has supported a bid to host 2021 International Congress of Plant Molecular Biologist (IPMB) in Cairns lead by Joshua Mylne from UWA. I am pleased to inform member that this bid was successful, and the conference is coming to Australia. It is my understanding that conference organizers have managed to secure a substantial ($200K) financial support from Tourism Australia, and TEQ. Well done, Joshua and a team!

No financial commitments were made by ASPS to any of these bids at this stage (and are not expected in the future).

Congratulations to ASPS award winners

* **Dr Caitlin Byrt** (University of Adelaide) is a winner of the **Peter Goldacre Award**. 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 a 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 the Functional Plant Biology. Caitlin received this award for her works on identifying and characterising genes and mechanisms influencing food crop productivity in dry and saline environments. Recently her team discovered a subset of plant water channels (aquaporins) that can transport both water and ions. This is a pivotal discovery in relation to resolving the mechanisms important in salt and water cotransport and ion uptake in plant roots.
* **Dr Eloise Foo** (University of Tasmania)is an inaugural winner of the **Jan Anderson award** for her work on the role of plant hormones in regulating development and the interaction of plants with their biotic and abiotic environment. This Award was introduced in 2018 and is made to an early or mid-career female in recognition of outstanding research conducted subsequent to their PhD. The award is named after Joan (Jan) Mary Anderson FAA FRS FDhc (Umeå), an internationally acclaimed plant biologist renowned for her discoveries on the organization of the intricate membrane structures that carry out solar energy conversion in cells of green plants. Jan’s experiments and insights changed the way we think about the light reactions of photosynthesis. Her research career spanned some 55 years, mostly at the Division of Plant Industry CSIRO Canberra (1961-97) and then in the Research School of Biological Sciences at the Australian National University. The award is supported by $2000 cash price and is sponsored by CSIRO Agriculture and Food, the ARC Centre of Excellence in Plant Energy Biology and the ARC Centre of Excellence for Translational Photosynthesis.

Special thanks to Rana Munns and other ASPS members who were involved in developing guidelines and funding rules, and also judged submitted applications.

* **Dr Michael Udvardi** (Noble Research Institute, Oklahoma, USA) is a winner and a presenter of the RN Robertson Lecture in 2018. 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 when Bob turned 81. These alternate with the JG Wood memorial lectures. Michael is a Chief Scientific Officer at Noble Institute who has earned his PhD from the Australian National University in 1989. He is primarily interested in how plants obtain nitrogen for growth, either as mineral nitrogen from the soil or from atmospheric di-nitrogen via symbiotic nitrogen fixation in bacteria.
* **Dr Getnet Dino Adem** (University of Tasmania) is a winner of the **ASPS-FPB Best Paper Award** for an Early- Career Scientist published in Functional Plant Biology in 2017. The prize includes a personal one-year print + online subscription to FPB, a $250 book voucher from CSIRO PUBLISHING, and a certificate. The award goes for the paper “*Expressing Arabidopsis thaliana V-ATPase subunit C in barley (Hordeum vulgare) improves plant performance under saline condition by enabling better osmotic adjustment” (FPB 2017; volume 44)*.
* **R.N. Robertson Travelling Fellowship** was awarded to **Jonathan Dragwidge** (La Trobe University) to travel to Heidelberg, Germany, to visit the lab of Prof. Karin Schumacher. Jonathan project in the Gendall lab at La Trobe University involves studying the importance of a class of Na+/H+ exchanger proteins or NHXs in the model plant species Arabidopsis thaliana. During his time in Germany, he has used electron microscopy to resolve the ultrastructure cellular vesicle called multi-vesicular bodies involved in delivery of protein cargo.
* **Dr Beth Lovey** (University of Adelaide) is a recipient of the **ASPS Teaching Award** in 2017. The award recognises excellence, innovation and/or contributions to teaching of plant science at University level. Beth leads the teaching of several units of study at the University of Adelaide and developed a new unit for 2017. Beth developed the ‘flipped classroom’ pre-lab activities that can be attempted multiple times by her students to reinforce their learning. This is achieved by creating videos of herself performing lab techniques for the students. Beth strongly believes in continuous improvement for all aspects of her teaching and she has presented her teaching analyses at several conferences and other meetings.

I am certain that all of you will join me congratulating the recipients with these fantastic achievements and wishing them all the best in the future endeavors.

Support to Australian plant science

* 18 students have received 2018 ASPS COMBIO Student Travel Awards totaling $7856;
* ASPS provided $2,500 to support the screening in Canberra of “Food Evolution” a documentary about genetically modified food, which was tied in with a live Q&A with the director (in the USA) immediately after the screening
* ASPS has committed $5000 as a seed funding towards ARC CoE on Translational Photosynthesis to conduct a workshop on translation to impact.

# Prestigious recognitions

# Prof Christine Beveridge (UQ) has received a highly prestigious ARC Georgina Sweet Australian Laureate Fellowship. Christine is Associate Dean (Research) and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Science at The University of Queensland, where she leads the Plant Development Lab in the School of Biological Sciences. Her research in plant development focusses on understanding the role of plant hormones in the regulation and coordination of plant development.

# ASPS Communication

ASPS publishes a society newsletter, Phytogen, in order to reach our own members plus general readers with an interest in developments in Australian plant science. Phytogen is thus a vehicle for communicating new ideas, recent professional experiences, and forthcoming events. Routine items include: invitations to submit applications for Society awards that identify outstanding researchers, nominations for election of Corresponding members overseas, nominations for RN Robertson and JG Wood lectures, advance notice of plant science meetings and of course, reminders to renew subscriptions. For content submissions contact Editors - Dr Chris Cazzonelli (c.cazzonelli@uws.edu.au)\_or Georgia Koerber (georgia.koerber@adelaide.edu.au)

Science Meets Parliament

Every year about 200 scientists representing a broad spectrum of Australian science (from plant biologists to chemists, physicists and mathematicians) come to Canberra for two days to learn about how politics, policymaking and the media work and raise our concerns with politicians. In 2017 Three our members – Mike Haydon, Janet Wheeler and Barry Pogson attended this event in March. Please check ASPS website for their report.

# 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 Alice Hall, for her 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.

From 2019, FPB will be listed in Pubmed. We expect this will increase the journal’s visibility and increase its standing in rankings. The recently published (see below) and future special issues are also expected to contribute to this.

*Published*

* Plant Phenotyping 44(1) 2017
* Flooding and Low Oxygen Responses in Plants 44(9) 2017
* Plant Signalling: From Molecules to Behaviour 45(1&2) 2018
* Editor’s Choice – ‘Abiotic stress signalling and adaptation’ Virtual Issue Oct. 2017

*Forthcoming*

* Ion Transport in Plant Organelles, 2019

ASPS affiliation with MDPI

Recently ASPS has become affiliated with two MDPI journals, [*International Journal of Molecular Sciences (IJMS)*](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/ijms)and [*Plants*](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/plants). All ASPS members who will be willing to publish their papers in thee journals will receive a 15% discount on the article processing charges. A limited number of full fee waivers for special cases can also be discussed and agreed on. MDPI will also provide a discount on the article processing charges for selected papers collected from ASPS conferences (in case we decide to proceed this way) and promote ASPS conferences on the journal homepages. Meeting reports of ASPS conferences will be published free of charge in IJMS and Plants. Most importantly, IJMS and/or Plants is keen to sponsor different activities at the ASPS conferences (e.g. keynote speaker, travel grant for PhD students or Postdocs, best poster awards, coffee breaks, etc.) depending on the annual marketing budget of the journals. We are also in a process of discussing a named journal’s award (similar to FPB).

For the details on how to claim the discount, please contact the MDPI Managing Editor, Dr. Rui Liu by rui.liu@mdpi.com

The specific information about *IJMS* and *Plants* can be found below



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[*Plants*](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/plants) (ISSN 2223-7747; CODEN: PLANCD) is an open access journal of plant science. Our aim is to encourage scientists and research groups to publish theoretical and experimental results of research in all fundamental and applied fields of plant science. *Plants* is indexed in BIOSIS Previews (Clarivate Analytics), Scopus and other important databases. Citations are available in [PubMed](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=2223-7747) and full-text are archived in [PubMed Central](http://preview.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/journals/2909/). Manuscripts are peer-reviewed and a first decision provided to authors approximately 20 days after submission; acceptance to publication is undertaken in 5.8 days (median values for papers published in 2017).

Executive Committee & Administration

I would like to thank all the members of ASPS executive team for their great support in the last 12 months. My special thanks go to Matt Gilliham (our Honorary Secretary), Rosemary White (Honorary Treasurer) and John Evans (Public Officer) who have taken all the frontline job and worked tirelessly throughout the year. I am also very grateful to Janet Wheeler and Chris Cazzonelli for maintaining high ASPS profile. Without your help this would simply be not possible.

I would also like to extend my warm welcome to our new ASPS President-Elect, Kathleen Soole, and new discipline representatives

* Kim Johnson (Plant Development)
* Mike Haydon (Genetics and Molecular Biology)
* Megan Shelden (Cell Biology)
* Tracey Cuin (Whole Plants)

Sergey Shabala, ASPS President

September 2018