***2019 ASPS President’s Report***

ASPS promotes the discipline of Plant Science and provides professional contact and networking for plant scientists and University-level educators in Australia. <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.

It has been 14 months since the last Society meeting and AGM, so a little longer than usual due to our new annual meeting structure. I have had a number of demands at a family and work level that has severely limited the time that I could contribute to the Society during 2019, but I feel that this will turn around in 2020.

Despite this, due to the support of an unbelievably fantastic executive and council team, I can re-assure you that the Society had continued to deliver on its key objectives and more. So I begin this report by thanking the ‘team”. A great deal of thanks go to the outgoing Hon. Treasurer, Rosemary White, for all her work during her term, it was appreciated and we wish her all the best for her future in retirement. Also many thanks to the Secretary, Vanessa Melino, and her amazing organisational skills and Janet Wheeler, who keeps the website and database going. These scientists have been incredible source of support and energy. Thanks also go to, Rachel Burton, our representative on Science Technology Australia <http://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/> ; Barry Pogson, our representative on the Global Plant Council and Ros Gleadow who is President of that Council <http://globalplantcouncil.org/>.

Thanks should also go to the whole Website and Communications Sub-Committee who have been busy promoting ASPS and have helped to keep the website active and of course all the Discipline Representatives, student representatives and Beth Loveys our Teaching rep, all of whom have actively participated in many of our activities this year.

**ASPS meeting 2019.**

The last two years have seen the adoption of a new structure for our annual meetings with Combio (the partnership we have with other relevant Australian (and New Zealand) Societies to jointly organise the national conference), where we alternate years between such a joint meeting and now a Society only meeting. This year marks the first year for our Society to hold its own national meeting. This will be held from 26th to 30thNovember, with last being a focussed Grains satellite meeting at LaTrobe University. The Society is very grateful to the whole organising committee and especially Kim Johnson, Monika Doblin and Tony Bacic for their hard work and also to LaTrobe University for hosting it. It’s sure to be a success with XXX registrants both national and international speakers. The Society provided some financial sponsorship to this meeting and there were 19 applicants for the conference travel grants to help students attend the meeting, which is an excellent response and compliments the inaugural student-focussed session that the organisers have introduced. It is an excellent opportunity for our up-coming future leaders and researchers. The program looks great and I am extremely excited for us to have a specific communication and teaching session, that’s part of our Society meeting rather than the joint ones we have had in previous years,

**Future meetings**

Here are the current plans for our future meetings;

* ComBio 2020 and thanks goes to Ros Gleadow (Monash University) who is the ASPS representative on the organising committee
* In 2021 we will hold our ASPS meeting that year as part of IPMB I to be held in Cairns, Oct 25-29th <http://ipmb2021.org/>. We will need people to take part in this organization with Josh Mylne who has been a major driver to get this conference in Australia. Promotional information will be available during the 2019 meeting.
* Combio 2022 will be held in Canberra at the National Convention Centre in the week of 26th September. John Carver from ANU is the Chair of the organising committee and when these arrangements have been confirmed we will need to nominate people for that committee to represent ASPS and help with the program design.
* For 2023, we are looking for location suggestion and volunteers, which we will canvass for soon.

**Other conferences**.

In the last 12 months, ASPS has supported several bids for the major meetings held or to be in Australia. These included:

* **InnovAg Translational Photosynthesis Conference** held in Brisbane (30 June-3 July, 2019)
* **Symposium celebrating Barry Osmond: Reflections in a Flash** which was held Sept 12th and 13th at ANU, celebrating Barry’s 80 th birthday and his contribution to Plant Science.
* **Workshop on engineering ion channel aquaporins and boosting food security**, to be held 12-13th May 2020 at ANU, organized by Caitlin Byrt. <https://biology.anu.edu.au/news-events/workshop-engineering-ion-channel-aquaporins-and-boosting-food-security>

**Congratulation to ASPS Awards winners in 2019**

* **Dr. Simon Williams** (RBS, ANU) on winning the **Peter Goldacre Award** for his research on the activation mechanisms of plant innate immune receptors. He received this award for his work on plant innate immunity and elucidating important protein: protein interactions and the subsequent immune activation pathway. He began this work during his PhD studies at Flinders University and post-doctoral positions at UQ and a ARC DECRA Fellowship at ANU and in 2018 he accepted an academic position at ANU. He has utilized X-ray crystallography and protein biochemistry to understand host-microbe interactions and his laboratory continues to utilize structural biology and protein biochemistry to study the protein interaction basis and mechanism of plant defense system against pathogens.

The Goldacre 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.

* **Dr. Monika Murcha** who won the **Jan Anderson Award** and was part of a very competitive field of applicants this year. Monika won this award for her prestigious and acknowledged work on mitochondrial biogenesis in plants. She gained her PhD at UWA and an ARC Future Fellowship enabled her to start her own laboratory there. Her research has focussed on the components involved in the biogenesis of mitochondria in plants and its role in development and stress biology. She has elucidated many novel components involved this pathway and discovered how they regulate the process. Her aim is to unravel the underlying mechanisms of protein import and macromolecule targeting, key regulatory elements governing mitochondrial activity and thus cellular activity, plant growth and responses to stress.

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. 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.

* **Dr Sigfredo Fuentes (Univ of Melbourne)** is the recipient of the **ASPS Teaching Award** in 2019. The award recognises excellence, innovation and/or contributions to teaching of plant science at University level. Sigfredo won this award for his work on the development of new and emerging technologies for digital teaching and learning in plant physiology. In this work he developed apps that can be used on smart phones etc to collect data from devices collecting information such as infrared thermal imaging and near infrared spectroscopy. These technologies have made the development and application of novel tools for teaching and learning purposes in plant physiology readily accessible. Whilst he has applied them in viticulture they may have scope in other areas of plant science.
* **Prof Ros Gleadow** (Australian National University) will deliver the 2019 **J.G Wood Lecture** atthe ASPS 2019 meeting**.** JG Wood was the foundation President of ASPP. His contributions are recognized in a series of biennial JG Wood memorial lectures by eminent plant scientists. Her talk is entitled “Stress, Defence and Photosynthesis are Entangled” and her research focuses on the effect of climate change on food security with a focus on plants that make cyanide and the impact on human and animal health. She holds many prestigious positions including being President of the Global plant Council and has been a past president of ASPS and a very apt recipient of this invitation.

* **Alex Wu** (University of Queensland) for winning the **ASPS-FPB Best Paper Award for an Early-Career Scientist** published in Functional Plant Biology in 2019: [Simulating daily field crop canopy photosynthesis: an integrated software package](http://www.publish.csiro.au/fp/FP17225), by A Wu, [A Doherty](https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=QtqjfIIAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=sra), [GD Farquhar](https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=YQKKTRYAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=sra), [GL Hammer](https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=14d9qrkAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=sra) - Functional Plant Biology, 45: 362-377. The prize includes a personal one-year print online subscription to FPB, a $250 book voucher from CSIRO PUBLISHING, and a certificate. Alex will present his work at Combio 2020.
* **Juan dela Cruz Jimenez Serna (UWA)** and **Carolyn Vlasveld (Monash Univ.)** were both awarded the **RN Robertson Travelling Fellowship** in 2019.Juan will visit Prof. Ole Pedersen at the University of Copenhagen and Carolyn will visit Assoc. Prof. Tim Brodribb at the University of Tasmania. Reports from previous winners are available at: http://www.asps.org.au/awards/robertson-fellowship

**Website & Communications.**

This sub-Committee (WSCS) have the goal to disseminate information related to ASPS and plant biology among the society members and general public and promote ASPS. They do this through **Phytogen** <http://www.asps.org.au/publications/phtyogen/phytogen-blog> and social media activities. This team are doing a fantastic job and I believe through both of these media, they have increased the visibility of ASPS. They have collected data that reflects this and you can see that in their 2019 report. I thank them for a great year and please keep doing such a good job.

**Plants in Action** 2 <http://www.asps.org.au/plants-in-action-2nd-edition-pdf-files>

We are pleased to announce that Plant in Action is being produced as a black and white version in Hindi for distribution. It is being offered at a very low price to make it more accessible as a teaching aid in countries like India . Special thanks to Rana Munns who has been the driving force behind this important project, and Uli Mathesuis as her deputy editor.

**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 thank ASPS members for your contributions to the peer review process for FPB.

**Science Meets Parliament**

Unfortunately this year there was a late decision to change the dates for this event and it clashes with ASPS 2019. However, Tracey Cuin and Ricky Milne will still attend this event to represent ASPS and miss some, if not all, of our meeting. We will report on how this goes at our next AGM and also watch out on our website for updates.

**Science and Technology Australia**.

We are active participants in this group and unfortunately the STA AGM is being held at the same time as ASPS 2019. This means our Representative Rachel Burton is unable to attend ASPS 2019.

Vanessa Melino and Rachel Burton also represented ASPS at the 2018 AGM and an outcome from this meeting was the development of a draft Diversity and Inclusion Policy put together by Vanessa and it will be discussed at the AGM. I would encourage the Society to accept this policy and its posting on our website which has been encouraged by STA. Our introduction of the Jan Anderson Award has been a step towards addressing the suggestions from the STA but we could take this further with respect to other proposals presented in the policy.

**Prestigious Recognitions**

Congratulations go to two notable plant scientists were elected to the Australian Academy of Science in 2019. They were Prof Jim Whelan (La Trobe University) and Dr Surinda Singh (CSIRO).

**Constitutional Change Proposal at 2019 AGM**

You would have seen the correspondence about proposing a change to the constitution to move to state reps instead of discipline reps and I voiced the reasons for what I have proposed there. One of the main reasons that I proposed this change was ensure that we have representation in each state for the society as this has not been the case in the last few years. I think having the broad representation would encourage communication within each state and would help to promote membership. I also would like to propose that we supply each rep in each state or territory with a small amount of funds to each state to have an annual day or evening event organised by the local rep to promote regional net-working and keep a profile of the Society during each year, by providing more benefit to members.

I can see that this has generated some discussion and ideas and that’s great to see such participation. If we don’t get enough votes and need to remain with same constitution requirements, then I plan to ensure that there is will be a rep or more in each state.

I wish to encourage members to promote the Society and its membership as we move into 2020 to help foster the next generation of plant scientists which provides a focal point for plant science in Australia. I will make this an aim of mine as well into 2020.

Kathleen Soole

President, Australian Society of Plant Scientists

November 2019