**STA report for the ASPS council meeting September 2020 – from Plant and Ecological Sciences Cluster Representative Rachel Burton**

*What is STA?*

The STA represents STEM organisations in Australia, including ASPS, of which the total membership has risen to over 80,000 STEM professionals in 2020. STA is increasingly becoming recognised as a valuable and accurate resource to underpin policy submissions and is working hard to better connect scientists with politicians and to make the STEM voice heard.

*STA Leadership*

Since last year there has been a change of leadership. Jeremy Brownlie has replaced Emma Johnstone as President and Mischa Schubert took over from Kylie Walker as CEO when she moved on to head ATSE. The transition was almost seamless and STA has maintained its place as a relevant and responsive organisation in the STEM landscape.

*The effects of COVID*

STA organises a number of events during the year, of which Science Meets Parliament (SmP) is the main one. As with most face to face events planned for 2020 this has been acutely impacted by COVID. The event was cancelled and has been rescheduled for March 2021, with firm dates to be locked in once the Parliamentary sitting calendar is finalised in November 2020. The event will take place as either face to face, on a suitable online platform or as a hybrid of the two approaches.

National Science Week events were still held and supported by STA but an online format for many of them was adopted

The cancellation of the majority of the events hosted by STA in 2020 has had a budgetary impact. However, this has been well managed by the Board and STA remains solvent. COVID has also affected many of the member societies which STA acknowledge as a potential knock-on effect for a number of years into the future.

STA activities in 2019/2020:

* The second cohort of the Superstars of STEM have completed their second year. This group is twice the size of the first cohort (60 vs 30) and the program has been spread over two years instead of one. (<https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/what-we-do/superstars-of-stem/)>.

Dr Roberta De Bei, a viticulturist at the University of Adelaide, is in the second cohort <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/profile/dr-roberta-de-bei/>

* ASPS are represented in the Mentorship pool for this second cohort by Professor Rachel Burton who is matched with mentee Sharon Hook from CSIRO.
* The third cohort of the Superstars of STEM are currently under selection. This will also run across two years.
* At the AGM held in Canberra at the end of 2019 Dr Lee Constable, a member of ASPS, was elected as the Early Career Representative, in the face of stiff opposition. Lee will serve a two year term and she is a well known science communicator <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Constable>
* STA launched its second cohort of 17 Ambassadors of STEM where STEM professionals are matched with the Federal MP in the electorate in which they either live or work <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/?s=ambassadors+of+stem> ASPS has two representative in this second cohort
  + Dr Tracey Ann Cuin was matched with Brian Mitchell in the electorate of Lyons <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/profile/tracey-ann-cuin/>
  + Professor Rachel Burton was matched with Rebekha Sharkie in the electorate of Mayo <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/profile/prof-rachel-burton/>

This scheme is designed to build long term relationships between the scientist and the politician. The scientists have participated in a number of training workshops hosted by STA on zoom to equip them for getting the most out of the interaction. COVID has somewhat limited the opportunities for the program members to interact but this will hopefully become easier in the next couple of years.

* In 2020 STA have been particularly focussed on the effect of two events on STEM professionals and the policy submissions they have made can be found here <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/reports-and-publications/>
  + These include the effects of bushfires
  + And the effect of COVID on the STEM workforce
* STA have also generated a number of media releases on these topics and others, found here <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/news/>
* A new appointment was made to the STEM Sector Policy committee. Professor Megan Munsie (representing Australasian Society for Stem Cell Research) has now joined <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/acclaimed-stem-cell-researcher-joins-science-technology-australias-stem-sector-policy-committee/>

ASPS are represented at STA by a board member, who covers both ASPS as well as the Ecological Society of Australia (ESA). I commenced my two year term in November 2018 and have been enjoying the experience.

Nominations are currently open for election to the STA Board for the Plant and Ecological Sciences cluster. They close on 30th September 2020.