**STA report for the ASPS council meeting November 2021 – 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 2021. 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.

ASPS are represented at STA by a board member for the Plant and Ecological Sciences Cluster. I commenced my second two year term in November 2020. A new Board representative will need to be nominated and elected from the Cluster members to commence from November 2022.

*STA Leadership*

STA President Jeremy Brownlie and CEO Mischa Schubert have steered STA through a difficult year. Hampered by the uncertainties caused by COVID, STA has had to be flexible and innovative to ensure that their signature activities, especially Science Meets Parliament, could still take place. STA have been highly visible and productive in the policy space and have also released a comprehensive Reconciliation Action Plan <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/about-us/rap/>. STA continues to grow its reputation as a relevant and responsive organisation in the STEM landscape.

*STA Events*

STA organises a number of events during the year, of which Science Meets Parliament (SmP) is the main one. Due to COVID SmP 2020 was rescheduled and took place as a virtual event from 2nd March – 1 April 2021. The longer timeframe across the virtual format was designed to allow wider engagement by STA membership. An in-person celebration dinner took place in each capital city on 29th March 2021.

Planning for SmP 2022 is well underway. The event will be a similar format, with the majority of events offered virtually and will be held Monday 28th February to Friday 4th March. The incoming President, Professor Mark Hutchinson (from Adelaide Uni) is due to give the Press Club address on March 2nd and the celebration dinner in the eight capital cities will be on Thursday 2nd June 2022.

National Science Week events were still held and supported by STA in 2021 but an online format for many of them was adopted. STA will again kick-off National Science Week in 2022.

*Budget and Constitution overhaul.*

COVID has obviously had a budgetary impact on STA, especially since SmP was not run in 2020. However, this has been well managed by the Board and STA remains solvent. There has been a significant amount of staff turnover this year too. Most notably some key staff have followed the previous STA CEO Kylie Walker to ATSE but well qualified replacements have been appointed at STA.

COVID has also affected many of the member societies financially, which STA acknowledge as a potential knock-on effect for a number of years into the future, but a hopeful sign is that there have been new members join in 2021.

In particular the Hawkesbury Institute and the University of Western Sydney have recently joined our Cluster of Plant and Ecological Sciences – swelling member numbers from three to four!

There is a bit of an odd division of Societies into clusters and there is also an Agricultural and Food Sciences Cluster, which potentially ASPS is closely aligned to. The Clusters are defined by the STA constitution and are therefore not easily changed, but there is a member consultation process currently underway about modernising the Constitution. Merging some of the Clusters might be a better way to go, as well as dividing some of the much bigger ones.

STA activities in 2020/2021:

* The Superstars of STEM program has gone from strength to strength and alumni of the program continue to make an impact, whilst the third cohort are now part way through their two year program (<https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/what-we-do/superstars-of-stem/)>.
* There are now a significant number of 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> 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. The next round of applications are likely to be early next year.
* In 2021 STA have been very busy and have made a large number of submissions which can be found here <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/reports-and-publications/>
* STA have also generated a number of media releases on key topics, found here <https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/news/>

There was significant media attention around the annual [Professional Scientists Employment and Remuneration Report](https://apesma.informz.net/apesma/pages/2021_22_SCI_remuneration_report) by STA in collaboration with Professional Scientists Australia. It reveals the mounting toll on scientists caused by both the pandemic and longer-term chronic job insecurity.