
President's Report 2016/17*

It has been a big year for science, and so the Association has been kept busy. National and international politics have all had science elements to their discourse. With the evolving local science media, the New Zealand Association of Scientists still maintains a good profile when any science issue comes up. I believe this is as strong an indication of the health of the Association as membership numbers.

Our key event is the annual conference, and this year it had a theme around science outside the big institutes and usual players. If we want science and the Association to continue to be part of the science story in our society we have to get more people valuing, understanding and feeling part of science. Our secret weapon this year was youth – we invited along a group of high school science students and they really stamped a positive mood on the day.

The March for Science was an event that gained international attention and the NZAS had a high profile in the proceedings and discourse around what the day involved.

We start the New Year with a new government and a new Minister for Research, Science and Innovation, Dr Megan Woods, whom we have engaged with prior to the election. She attended the pre-election discussion on science hosted jointly by ourselves and the Public Service Association. We look forward to contributing further to debates around science. As noted previously, one of the things I will seek to promote is some form of Science Meets Parliament equivalent.

The Association was proud to support a public talk on Suffrage Day (18 September) exploring how we can reach equity for all scientists. I had the pleasure of introducing Dr Zuleyka Zevallos, an applied sociologist and an Adjunct Research Fellow with Swinburne University. She developed and managed Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE), an initiative of the Australian Academy of Science. Panellists Joanna Kidman, Izzy O'Neil, Di Tracey, and Richard Blaikie gave a local perspective on the ideas, and NZAS past-President Nicola Gaston closed the evening.

We maintained a high media profile, with press releases on a number of scientific issues including the science march. We also contributed to discussions on the future of the Marsden Funds, the MBIE definition of Impact, and the Royal Society report on Health and Climate.

It was a pleasure to see the reception of the renaming of the Research Award as the Beatrice Hill Tinsley Award. The coming awards will see us rename the Science Communication Medal [see page 70]. A big thanks goes to Peter Buchanan and the judges for their efforts.

New Zealand Science Review continues to provide a key outlet for reporting around science policy and ideas. We continue to look at ways to improve delivery and benefit to authors. Thanks go to Allen Petrey and Geoff Gregory along with the NZSR Editorial committee (Hamish Campbell, John Clare, and Mike Berridge) for maintaining and enhancing the quality of this important voice for the Association and for science.

The position of President is a two-year role. It takes a year to work out how the whole thing works – so that gives a year to inject ideas and energy and prepare for the next phase. I have proposed a change to the rules to allow for a co-Presidency, not only to share the burden, but to spread the perspective of the Association leadership. Although the Association feels strong, actual membership numbers continue to be a struggle. Our financial situation would also be marginal if it weren't for the grateful support from the now-defunct Association of Scientific and Technical Communicators through the efforts of Alan Knowles.

We continue to look at ways to either boost numbers and/or change the way the Association works, reflecting changing attitudes to membership and Association utility – Troy Baisden especially is to be thanked for his efforts in this and many other fronts.

My sincere thanks, on behalf of membership, goes to Council. This is all done 'on the side' by all of us, along with all the other things 'on the side'. If I had the energy I'd plot up the time-of-day some responses come in via email. Neil Curtis is thanked for his role as Patron, although as noted by all, we haven't really worked out what to do with the role. Fiona McDonald continues her vital secretarial/organisational duties, Chris Bumby wrestles with the accounts, Troy Baisden provides ideas and energy, Nicola Gaston and Shaun Hendy provide substantial support, wisdom and experience – especially around working with the media. Peter Buchanan's tireless work to organise the awards is a great deal of effort handled smoothly. Simon Granville provides support around web activity but also much more besides this, with ideas, passion and careful analysis. Mike Berridge, John Clare, and Desmond Darby are as ever, valued, with their wealth of experience around various aspects of the New Zealand science system. I also thank the members of the Association outside Council who also helped out where needed. To those leaving Council, I thank them and welcome new members to take up the mantle. I look forward to the New Year and seeing what we can achieve for New Zealand science.

Craig Stevens
President

* Presented at the New Zealand Association of Scientists' 76th Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 1 November 2017 at 'Caroline', Manners Street, Wellington