
New Zealand Association of Scientists 68th Annual Reports

President's Report for 2008/09

This report was submitted for consideration at the Association's 68th Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 2 November 2009 at Science House, Turnbull St, Wellington.

This is the second and final report of my two-year term as President of the Association. During this time I have been fortunate to have had a stable line-up of Office Bearers and Council Members. With the resignation of three Council members during the course of 2009 (two at the AGM), we are at this time seeking to introduce new people to the Council. The new Council must continue to build on the changes that have been introduced over the past two years and in particular ensure that the Association is clearly recognised by external stakeholders as being the group to go to for science comment and expertise and being synonymous with the voice of the scientists. Equally important, the science community must once again recognise the Association as being truly representative of itself and therefore an organisation that people will join. This challenge of membership numbers remains, and if not addressed in the coming few years will ensure that the Council faces the tough question as to the viability of the Association.

As part of our work to reinvigorate the Association we have built on the directions instigated in 2008. Firstly, to ensure the timely publication of *New Zealand Science Review*. We have again produced the targeted number of issues (one per quarter) this year. It is crucial that this continues to be the case and that we ensure that issues are planned well in advance but that we can also respond to issues as they come up. Secondly, to have a dedicated team who are responsible for media releases and commenting on the issues of the day. Again this subcommittee is now firmly in place, and while we have not made our target of six press releases per year we have noticed that we are getting more media exposure and better take-up on the information in our releases this year compared with last year – and this is a very pleasing result. This is an area that continually needs to be worked on though, and it requires a dedicated group of people willing and able to rapidly putting together copy to get out to the media. And finally, to develop a strategic direction. We now have in place specific core values and strategic goals that we have much debated in Council but that we now all fully support. We therefore place these in the hands of the new Council and charge them with taking them forward.

Collectively, we believe that by ensuring that we regularly publish a comprehensive journal that addresses issues of the day, includes opinion pieces, reports on science advances and commentaries on policy development, combined with an active and vocal presence in the New Zealand media and a desire to realise our strategic goals within the next five years, it will ensure that we have a basis that is relevant and strong to meet the needs of science and scientists today and into the future.

The same two big issues that the Association has faced for the past five or more years continue to plague us: membership and money. As our financial basis continues to be eroded, the number of years that we can continue to function without reversing these problems is drastically shortened. While we have put many things in place that we believe in the long run will

benefit the financial status and membership numbers, we have not seen a reversal of the decline to date.

In addition to the things highlighted above, the other major driver for this year has been the continued work on the 2008 Survey of Scientists, which is due to be published shortly (see below for more details). We will utilise the data from the survey as part of the basis for our new strategic direction and to influence public debate and government policy.

Thanks to all the members of Council that I have worked with over the past two years. Their input into our meetings and their enthusiasm for the changes is greatly appreciated.

Membership

This year we saw our membership numbers remain relatively unchanged, and while this is an improvement on the continual decline of recent years, there is still considerable work needed to get our numbers up to something representing the 10% of all New Zealand-based scientists that is our goal. There is a strong feeling in the Council that recent efforts have ensured that the NZAS brand is getting out there and that we are performing a valuable role in the best interests of the science community. We are positive that the measures taken to refocus and reinvigorate the Association will lead to increased membership numbers. We encourage all of our current members to individually play their role in promoting the Association to their professional colleagues and asking them to consider becoming members.

Subscription rates increased slightly this year and overall income has remained reasonably stable compared with previous years.

Awards and medals*

The Marsden Medal, Shorland Medal, Research Medal and Communicators Award are presented each year at the NZAS Awards Ceremony. In 2009 the Awards Ceremony was held for the first time as a separate function on Thursday 12 November. The Minister of Research, Science and Technology, the Hon Dr Wayne Mapp and the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor Prof Sir Peter Gluckmann attended this year.

Detailed briefly below are the awardees.

Marsden Medal

The Marsden Medal is awarded to recognise scientists who have contributed a lifetime of outstanding service to the cause or profession of science in New Zealand in the widest connotation of the phrase. The recipient of this medal for 2009 is Dr Fred Davey FRSNZ, Researcher Emeritus, Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences Ltd (GNS Science).

Dr Davey, a marine geophysicist, established the first comprehensive marine geophysical capability in New Zealand in the 1970s and in particular was involved in the documentation of the broad geological structure of the New Zealand continental plateau. In Antarctica, his internationally collaborative research

* This part of the President's report is abridged, as details of the Association's awards and medals are given in the following article. Editor

focused on understanding the structure and tectonic history of the Ross Sea region and its glacial history. Amongst his society work he has been the Chairman of the RSNZ Committee on Antarctic Sciences and Vice-President of the ICSU Scientific Committee on Antarctic Science (SCAR).

Shorland Medal

The Shorland Medal is awarded in recognition of major and continued lifelong contribution to basic or applied research that has added significantly to scientific understanding or resulted in significant benefits to society. The 2009 medal is presented to Prof Alan Kaiser FRSNZ, MacDiarmid Institute for Advanced Materials and Nanotechnology, School of Chemical and Physical Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington.

Professor Kaiser has had a distinguished career, his research focusing around the investigation of the electronic properties of several types of novel conducting material, ranging from conducting plastics to glassy metals, magnetic materials to superconductors, with a particular focus on understanding the conduction processes.

Research Medal

The Association's Research Medal is awarded to a younger scientist for outstanding fundamental or applied research in the physical, natural or social sciences published during the year of the award or the preceding three calendar years. The winner of the 2009 medal is Dr Thomas Buckley, Landcare Research.

Dr Buckley's research focus encompasses systematics, biogeography, speciation, molecular evolution and phylogenetic methods. Study organisms include stick insects, cicadas, fungus-feeding beetles, tortricid moths, earthworms, wetas, onychophorans and terrestrial molluscs.

Science Communicator Award

The Science Communicator Award is presented to practising scientists for excellence in communicating science to the general public in any area of science or technology. The 2009 winner is Professor Ian Shaw, University of Canterbury.

Ian Shaw has consistently over three decades shown a willingness to write and talk about food science and health to aid the public's understanding. Whether penning a column for *The Press*, hosting a public lecture or writing books, his science communication is engaging and lively, and goes to the heart of science-related issues that impact on society.

Council Membership and Affiliates

I thank and acknowledge the following members of Council:

Professor Neil Curtis, our Patron and Chair of the Awards Subcommittee

Hamish Campbell, Past-President (carrying on, beyond his term due to the resignation of David Lillis in 2007, the immediate Past-President) and Chair of the *Science Review* Subcommittee

Jim Renwick, Vice-President and Chair of the Communications Subcommittee

Janet Grieve, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Minute Secretary

Fiona MacDonald, Executive Secretary

Ken Richardson, Webmaster, Chair of the Strategic Direction Working Party

Vanessa Sherlock, Website content

George Jones, for maintaining e-mail contact with members and organising new medals

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the other members of Council: Mike Berridge, Peter Buchanan, John Clare, Dennis Gordon, Vince Gray, and Chris Sissons, who have all been very active members of the various subcommittees. Their contributions have been invaluable in ensuring the success of NZAS activities during the year.

With Vanessa leaving the Council during the year and relinquishing the responsibility of the website, I thank both Peter Buchanan and Darelle Thomson for stepping up and taking on this responsibility.

I make special mention of both Dennis Gordon and George Jones, who will be leaving the Council this year. Dennis has been a member of Council since approximately 1997. During this time his major contribution has been with regard to making sure the *Science Review* is of the highest standard. He has also written articles and editorials for the *Review*. George came slightly later to Council than Dennis, starting in 1999; at the time George was President of the RSNZ Wellington Branch and on the Council of RSNZ, and as such he has been a strong link between the two organisations. We thank them both for their major contributions to Council.

In addition to the members of Council we have a number of dedicated people that ensure the activities of the Association are fulfilled, in particular I recognise the contributions made by:

Allen Petrey, Editor of *New Zealand Science Review*

Ross Moore, Survey of Scientists Coordination

David Penny, Massey University, Independent Chair of the Awards Judging Panel and responsible for the Marsden and Shorland Medals; Desmond Darby, GNS, responsible for the Research Medal, and Peter Griffin, Science Media Centre, responsible for the Science Communicator Award.

Kathryn McGrath
President NZAS