

President's Report

Once again it has been a successful year for the New Zealand Microbiological Society. The key event of the year was the celebration of the 50th anniversary meeting at the joint NZMS-NZ Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology conference in Dunedin. This was an extremely well organised event and the local organising committee are to be congratulated for putting together an excellent scientific and social programme. A highlight of the event was the conference dinner at which we were able to acknowledge and honour the efforts of our founding and honorary members who have contributed so much to the Society. The year also marked the publication of the history of the Society and we are indebted to Professors John Tagg, Sandy Smith, Terry McQuire, and Frank Austin and all the other contributors for the countless hours that were required to generate this lasting record of our development over the years.

Now, in 2006, we operate in a very different regulatory and communications environment from that which existed fifty or even fifteen years ago and our activities over the last twelve months reflect this.

The increasing level of regulation, particularly that required under HASNO, is one of the more challenging problems facing our membership in the conduct of microbiological research. Unfortunately we have made little progress towards any change in legislation that would recognise microorganisms as being different from defined species of plants and animals. However ERMA have acknowledged our concerns, and this year approved a broad application from the University of Auckland that will at least streamline the process for importation of new microorganisms from low risk group categories. This is certainly an issue on which the society should continue to take an active role.

The newsletter continues to be an issue that affects many members. The purpose of the newsletter is to maintain contact with, and inform its members of news and relevant activities. However this is reliant on members providing regular contributions. Last year our current editor, Greg Cook, suggested that we identify a panel of regional editors with shared responsibility for obtaining regular contributions. This has not been instituted as yet, but I would suggest that it is necessary if we are to continue to use this as the main forum for communication with our membership.

The website is becoming an increasingly important means for keeping in touch with our members. Through considerable effort on the part of our NZMS secretary, Ralph Jack, the website has been re-modelled and is now regularly updated with details of events and job vacancies. I understand that this is now being regularly accessed by our overseas members and by others interested in microbiology-related work or study opportunities in New Zealand.

With one or two exceptions, activities by Special Interest Groups have continued to be relatively low key. Whether this is an issue of concern is a matter for discussion. However, I have received comment that there are some research areas that are not well represented in terms of speakers and

sessions at NZMS meetings (eg fungal and plant virus groups are active in New Zealand, but there are few relevant sessions at meetings).

Historically the SIGs, through their respective convenors, were involved in the development of the conference programme and provided suggestions for sessions and overseas speakers. One of the consequences of the reduced prominence of the SIG activities is that there is little involvement in the conference organisation. I would like to suggest that as a Society we attempt to re-invigorate the SIGs by both encouraging involvement in the development of the conference programme and in the hosting local symposia. This is an issue that will be raised for discussion at the AGM.

An issue raised by at the AGM was how the society might provide more benefits to its student members. The Society has previously supported its student members through reduced conference registration, travel grants to support attendance at the Annual meeting and competitions for the best student poster and oral presentations. A recent suggestion that has received some favourable support has been to co-opt a student representative onto the Executive. The purpose of this is to increase student participation in the Society and also to raise awareness within the Society of the particular issues affecting students. This will be an issue for further discussion at the AGM and nominations will be called for a student representative for the forthcoming year.

A significant issue for discussion at the next AGM is the future of joint meetings with the Australian Society, and possible alternative options for maintaining interactions between the societies. One suggestion is that instead of scheduling regular joint-meetings, that our societies provide support for SIG-orientated symposia. Any other suggestions would be welcomed and I would encourage members to start thinking about this now. I am happy to receive comments by email from anyone unable to attend the conference.

My last point is to offer my sincere thanks to the executive committee for their efforts over the last year, without which we would not exist. Finally I would note that plans for the 2006 meeting in Hamilton are shaping up well and I encourage you all to attend.

Susan Turner
President