

Dear NZMS members,

Preparations are well underway for the NZMS conference here in Palmerston North. In addition to wearing the NZMS President's hat, I am also on the conference organising committee and am pleased to report that we are planning an exciting conference both from the science perspective, and also with regard to the social events. Our conference convener this year is Steve Flint from Massey University, and he once again offered to lead the organising committee, several of whom have offered their time and energy again after our very successful conference here in Palmerston North in 2004. Steve and the team did a fantastic job back in 2004 and I am confident that this year will be even better. Many of you will have already submitted abstracts and be taking advantage of early bird registration, and I urge you to sign up in good time to take advantage of the reduced rates.

I am hopeful that the new NZMS initiatives that we have been working on with our colleagues from the American Society for Microbiology and the Australian Society for Microbiology will come to fruition in time for late November when the conference opens. Through our interactions with American Society for Microbiology we have been able to secure free registration for the winner of the Best Student Speaker at the NZMS conference this year, to present their work and attend the ASM conference in San Francisco in June next year ([www.asm.org/index.php/meetings/general-meeting12.html](http://www.asm.org/index.php/meetings/general-meeting12.html)). The NZMS will provide funding for travel to the conference and assist with accommodation through our interactions with ASM. We believe that this will make the Best Student Speaker competition a much more exciting event with a significant prize for the best student. The student poster competition will occur as at previous NZMS meetings.

Another student initiative we have been working on is with our friends across the Tasman Sea. We hope that we will be able to welcome a student from Australia at the conference here in Palmerston North as the inaugural recipient of the Australian Society for Microbiology – NZMS Research Travel award. This reciprocal initiative facilitates the collaboration between Australian and New Zealand research teams. Each year, an Australian/New Zealand student will be able to spend about two weeks in the laboratory of a collaborator immediately before or after the NZMS/ASM conferences. Free registration will be provided by ASM for the New Zealand student, and vice versa, at each respective society's annual conference where they will present their research. ASM/NZMS will provide funding for travel and accommodation to the other country. We envisage that the first NZ recipient will be identified in February next year. These initiatives not only allow us to provide exciting opportunities to support our young scientists overseas, and promote stronger links between like-minded societies, but will also allow scientists at the start of their research career to showcase New Zealand research overseas on a truly international stage. I encourage you to suggest to your students that they apply for these awards. Further details should be available on the NZMS website in due course.

We continue to have an enthusiastic and dedicated Executive Team. Our Treasurer Richard Muirhead did a great job ensuring that all membership invoices were sent out earlier this year and this ensured that subscription renewals came in much more quickly than in previous years. This was especially important to ensure that student members were eligible for the competitions at the conference in November. Ralph Jack our Secretary has updated the NZMS website to ensure that all the information on both our new student initiatives and the annual student travel awards to facilitate their attendance at the annual conference, is available. As always, Ralph is keen to post up-coming conferences, job advertisements and anything else significant up on the NZMS website to ensure that it stays fresh. You may remember that Greg Cook stood down as the Newsletter editor last year, but we have been fortunate that Nick Heng has volunteered to take over. As for the website, contributions for the New Zealand BioScience magazine are most welcome and could be a conference travel report, a philosophical look at a topical microbiological question, or a review of a new piece of laboratory kit. As part of the awards, those students who travel overseas will be expected to contribute short pieces to New Zealand BioSciences outlining their trip.

Once again I have represented the NZMS on the Royal Society of NZ (RSNZ) Biological and Life Sciences Advisory Panel, chaired by Dr Stephen Goldson, Vice President (Biological and Life Sciences). These Advisory Panels will respond to, and initiate contributions by, the RSNZ to critical public issues. Our recent meeting was attended also by Sir Peter Gluckman, who provided some insights on the role of the RSNZ in providing advocacy for science, feeding into international policy debates and provision of expert advice to the government.

I look forward to hearing the activities of the various Special Interest Groups (SIGs) over the past year. I know that the NZ Microbial Ecology Network (aka Microbial Ecology SIG) is planning another comprehensive meeting hosted by the Centre for Microbial Innovation at Auckland University Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2012. Mike Taylor and Matt Stott are preparing this meeting and already have a well-developed plan for the day with invited overseas speakers and a related statistics-for-microbiologists workshop scheduled for the next day (Friday 17<sup>th</sup> February). Please keep an eye out for further details and mark it in your diaries as their meeting in 2010 was extremely well-supported.

With that, I look forward to seeing you at the conference here in Palmerston North in late November where the scientific programme will be full of exciting science and the weather will be fine.

All the best.

Adrian Cookson.