

ROYAL SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND ANNUAL REPORT 2018–2019

OVERVIEW

This report covers the period from 11 October 2018 to 15 November 2019. The Society has again had an active year, with several inspiring events as well as timely publication of our journal.

In summary, the Society remains in excellent intellectual health but precarious financial health. During the year it made a significant contribution to outreach of science with its Rangelands initiative and, in so doing, confirmed a role in brokering the translation of science into policy. Repeatedly, the Society's officers questioned whether any other organisation, government or otherwise, was in a better position to champion a fresh approach to managing the semi-arid pastoral lands, and repeatedly came to the same conclusion: that no other body had the mandate, the necessary grounding in the natural and social sciences, and the independence from business-as-usual market economic orthodoxy.

It remained on the fringes of the climate debate, not through any intellectual timidity, but because many expert and well-resourced entities were already active.

During the year it strengthened its administrative team, which has allowed the workload of managing the Society's affairs to be shared and extended the capacity of the Council. Membership numbers have increased steadily during the year.

Council is proud that during the year it has again been able to publish first-rate material in its annual *Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland*. Volume 123 included five substantive scientific papers. In a demonstration of intellectual vigour and administrative optimism, Council readily agreed to support another four Special Issues of the *Proceedings*, in addition to the regular issue in 2019–2020.

We lost one of our most eminent Life Members in May, with the passing away of Emeritus Professor Trevor Clifford OAM.

Then the highlight and the low point of the year occurred within 10 days of each other in June. On 13 June, our Patron, His Excellency the Governor of Queensland, launched the Queensland Science Network at a reception in Government House and invested two new Honorary Life Members, Dr Ben Lawson and Ms Cate Melzer. Only 10 days later, Ben Lawson – our former Secretary and Treasurer – passed away. At the date of compiling this report, the Society is

negotiating some form of permanent memorial to his intellect, his character and his dedication to the public interest.

CORPORATE AFFAIRS

During the year the administrative capacity of the Society strengthened considerably, with the appointment part-time (average 2–3 hours per week) of Mrs Pam Lauder as Administration Coordinator, and John Tennock as Webmaster for both the Society's website and the Queensland Science Network website; and the agreement of James Hansen to serve as Secretary, and Dr Joseph McDowall to serve as Treasurer. Newsletter Editor Dr Anne-Marie Smit and Membership Coordinator Tony Van Der Ark round out the administration team.

Royal Society of Queensland Council

The Council elected at the Annual General Meeting comprised Angela Arthington, Paul Bell as Editor, Geoff Edwards as President, Andy Grodecki, James Hansen, Ross Hynes, Joseph McDowall, Revel Pointon, and Craig Walton as Immediate Past President.

Face-to-face meetings of Council were held on 1 March, 19 September and 12 November 2019. In each case, every Council member either attended or gave an apology. The vast bulk of issues are debated via email traffic.

Early in the new Council year, Dr Diogenes Antille offered to serve as Editor and Dr Paul Bell stood aside. Ross Hynes and Revel Pointon offered to serve as Assistant Editors. On 6 October, Revel Pointon took over as Acting Editor. We thank Diogenes Antille, Paul Bell, Ross Hynes and Revel Pointon for their collective endeavours in keeping the journal procedures flowing.

Finances

The Society continues to draw down its accumulated reserves in order to fund its current activities. The officers have been unsuccessful in securing significant general-purpose sponsorship. There have, however, been several highly valued donations from members, including a couple of substantial donations to the Research Fund; and a grant of \$9500 from the Queensland Government towards the cost of the Rangelands Policy Dialogue in June.

Library

During the year Meg Lloyd, our Honorary Librarian, retired from her post at Queensland Museum; and Shannon Robinson, the Museum's Librarian, accepted an invitation to serve in that role. New members may not be aware that they have free access to the Society's library of some 20,000 volumes housed at the Queensland Museum.

Membership roll

At 8 November 2019, the Society had 136 paid-up members, with others due for renewal. This is 40 more than at about the same time last year, a remarkable increase. There are six Honorary Life Members: Dr A. Bailey, Dr J. S. Jell, Dr J. O'Hagan, Ms C. Melzer, Prof. C. Rose and Prof. R. Specht.

Member Tony Van Der Ark has continued to maintain the Membership Roll. The role includes contacting those members whose memberships have expired, to clarify their intentions, and to guide them in renewing online.

A memorial service for long-standing member and Life Member Emeritus Professor Trevor Clifford OAM was held on 13 May at Christ Church St Lucia after a rapid and steep decline in his health. His wife, Mrs Gillian Clifford, passed away not two months later. A memorial service for member and Life Member Dr Ben Lawson was held on 2 July at Emmanuel College St Lucia. The Society was represented at both events. Our condolences are expressed to the family of each of these wonderful people.

Royal Society of Queensland Annual General Meeting – 29 November 2018

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held in the Community Meeting Room of the Brisbane City Council, Brisbane Square, Adelaide Street.

PUBLICATIONS

Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland

Volume 123, produced by former editor Dr Barry Pollock, appeared on time at the end of 2018. Volume 124 is now in preparation.

Four Special Issues are also in various stages of preparation: Volume 125, edited by Prof. Roger Kitching, on the Eungella rainforests; volume 126 on the springs of the Great Artesian Basin, co-edited by Dr Rene Rossini with Prof. Angela Arthington; volume 127 on preventative health, by Dr Joseph McDowall; and volume 128 on stewardship of the Rangelands, co-edited by Paul Sattler and Dr Ross Hynes.

Grants of \$9000 and \$15,000 have been gratefully received from the Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy; and the federal Department of Agriculture and Water, respectively, to print the Special Issue on the springs of the GAB. The federal grant will allow the Society to host a session at the November international groundwater conference in Brisbane.

Grants of \$2000 from Griffith University, \$1000 from Reef Catchments and \$500 from a private philanthropist have been received towards the cost of publishing the Eungella rainforests Special Issue. We are very grateful for the generosity of these sponsors.

The long-standing value of the Society's role in publishing general science was highlighted in an article in volume 123 by member Col Lynam reporting on a handwritten entry in the minute book of the Queensland Philosophical Society of 1865–1883, forerunner of The Royal Society of Queensland. The minute book records an earthquake west of Townsville in January 1879. "The discovery of this 4-page descriptive essay is of note because the earthquake's concurrence is not listed in any of the definitive Australian or international catalogues." The author believes it to have been the "first scientifically documented macroseismic study of an earthquake with an epicentre in Queensland".

Members' Newsletters

Fifteen Newsletters (including intermediate Notifications) were produced during the AGM–AGM year, against a target of monthly. Dr Anne-Marie Smit continued to edit the Newsletters, an important service in keeping a strong network amongst the membership. These Newsletters are privileged to members. Our Webmaster John Tennock is progressively uploading previous Newsletters to a members-only section of the website.

Members' publications

Apart from journal articles, four substantial book-length works were published by members in their own right during the AGM–AGM year:

- The mysteries of Frederick Strange, naturalist* / Patrick Comben
- Feast on Phytochemicals* / Paul Williams
- Tropical ecosystems in Australia: responses to a changing world* / Dilwyn Griffiths
- Living at a Lighthouse* e-book / Ron and Yvonne Turner.

Although the Society takes no credit for these works, we hope to strengthen the intellectual environment in

which our members feel confident to put their knowledge into print. The Society will arrange publicity for these works.

EVENTS

Preventative health – 20 February

The third in a series of three brainstorm-type workshops sponsored by PricewaterhouseCoopers was held on health in Indigenous communities, on 20 February 2019. Keynote speaker was Dr Damien Howard, Psychologist, Phoenix Consulting Darwin (by video link), on institutional silos as an impediment to progress. Panellists were:

- Dr Wendy Laupu RN, on strategies to preventing mental disorders;
 - Dr Joseph McDowall, CREATE Foundation, on reasons for the over-representation of Indigenous young people in out-of-home care;
 - Dr Geoff Edwards, President, Royal Society of Queensland, on “feasible paths” to well-being.
- Local Indigenous identity Dr Janet Hammill gave an acknowledgement of country.

The Society records with gratitude the willingness of the speakers who gave generously of their time to present. Dr Laupu travelled from North Queensland at her own expense to deliver.

The preparation of a model of preventative health, bridging disciplines, sectors, levels of government and partisan ideologies, is an unfulfilled commitment of the Society and the President. Progress has been slow because of the work occasioned by the Rangelands initiative.

World Science Festival, 23, 24 March

Our Membership Coordinator, Tony Van Der Ark, with the active assistance of several members, notched up a considerable success for the Society and its Queensland Science Network through organising and populating a booth at the World Science Festival on 23, 24 March with interesting activities and materials. Special thanks to Tony, his son and member Harry Van Der Ark, Council members James Hansen and Andy Grodecki, and members Robert Whyte, Anne Jones and Anne Marie Smit. The booth was very popular, and the organisers expressed a commitment to repeat the exercise next year.

Launch of Queensland Science Network, 13 June

Our Patron, His Excellency the Governor of Queensland, graciously hosted a reception at Government House

Paddington to invest two new Life Members, Dr Ben Lawson and Cate Melzer, and to launch the new website of the Queensland Science Network. In so doing, he officially launched the Network itself. At the reception he presented certificates to Tony Van Der Ark and his son Harry for their sterling work in organising the first official event conducted in the name of the Queensland Science Network, the booth at the World Science Festival.

Attendance was by invitation, and a good selection of representatives of member bodies made for a memorable occasion.

Rangelands Policy Dialogue, 1,2 July

Following the May 2018 presentation on stewardship incentives, the Society forged a collaboration with AgForce and NRM regions to present a two-day workshop to lay a foundation for Rangelands policy in the light of climate change and enduring unprofitability, which make business as usual in the pastoral zone untenable. The event was deferred from May, when advice was received from the Department of Environment and Science that they would be prepared to grant \$9500 on a no-strings-attached basis to support the Dialogue. AgForce contributed \$1990 towards the cost of the auditorium. These sums approximately covered the costs.

Attendance was loosely by invitation, and the event was strongly supported by members of the Society. Some 120 people attended. The Society is grateful to the presenters, “carrier pigeons” who conveyed successive reports to member Des Hoban in an adjoining room compiling notes, to member John Brisbin who excelled as Master of Ceremonies, and to Pam Lauder who organised the logistics. One of the intended outputs – A Rangelands Declaration – representing a consensus of the Dialogue and endorsed by the three co-organising bodies – was published on 20 August.

COMMENTARY

In mid-December 2018, *Queensland Country Life* invited the President to submit a regular column under its “View from the Paddock” series of opinion pieces. Columns were published on 7 February, 18 April, 27 June, 5 September and 14 November 2019. The newspaper also published a supernumerary column on 17 October defending the integrity of scientific publication. The Society is grateful to the Editor for allowing this opportunity to present opinions on behalf of Queensland’s scientists. All articles were printed without editorial amendment.

The online public policy newsletter *The Mandarin* published three opinion pieces from the President during the period under review:

- 25 October 2018, “Rural policy needs more than a one-day drought summit”;
- 12 March 2019, “Economic profit impossible if the Murray-Darling keeps eroding”;
- 12 July 2019, “Publicly funded research is the source of scientific knowledge economy” building upon research by member David Marlow on the subject of Gravestones – credible scientific bodies that have been abolished by governments despite success.

All draft opinion pieces, and indeed any public statements by the President on behalf of the Society, are cleared with Council beforehand.

RSQ AND QSN WEBSITES

The major advance during the year was the offer by John Tennock to serve as voluntary Webmaster. When John also offered to redevelop the QSN website in WordPress instead of the more demanding Drupal, Council offered a small honorarium. Both websites are now operating smoothly. Visitation to the QSN website is still low, but the potential for this to serve as the major portal into Queensland citizen science is very large. The layout of the reconstructed website is now intuitive, with a rapidly expanding archive of interesting materials.

As a general policy, the Society’s website is reserved for activities and publications by the Society and its members. The QSN website presents a wider range of general science activities and materials, largely (but not rigidly) confined to the activities of its member groups. The QSN website includes links to some other sites of general science interest, such as the Events Calendar of *Inspiring Australia Queensland*.

An article in the October Members’ Newsletter itemised the vehicles that the Society offers to its members to publish knowledge that they generate:

- a snippet in the Newsletter;
- an article, report or memoir under Members’ Interests on our website;
- an article on the QSN website in a range of formats; or
- a peer-reviewed article in our *Proceedings*.

To that can be added a draft of an opinion piece for issue by the President in the Society’s name.

Five members took advantage during the year of the

opportunity to open a page for their field of interest: Phil Andrews, Prof. T. Clifford, Elwyn Hegarty, David Marlow and Ron Turner. This opportunity is available free of charge to all members.

The digital membership roll has operated smoothly during the year. An encouraging expression of confidence in the Society’s work program is that many members have renewed for two or three years. Payments for new memberships and renewals that are made via cheque or direct bank deposit (a minority) are transferred manually. Members are reminded that if they make payment by direct bank deposit, they must identify the source at the time by filling in the “Reference” field, or the payment cannot be traced.

RESEARCH FUND

Consistent with the commitment in 2018 to fund grants in three successive years, a second round of grants was announced, and closed on 31 July. The Society congratulates Dr Michaela Blyton of the University of Queensland on winning the first award for a project on koala microbiomes; and Dr Bonnie Quigley, University of the Sunshine Coast, for a project on koala retrovirus infection. There was a strong field of contenders, and Council approved of publishing teasers for some runners-up in the hope that they might attract sponsorship.

The second award was possible because the Australian Koala Foundation agreed to sponsor the first award. This enabled the Society to make a second grant, which coincidentally was also on a koala theme. We express our gratitude to the Foundation and to three anonymous reviewers.

ROYAL SOCIETIES OF AUSTRALIA

A significant step in Australia’s science outreach was taken in September when Council approved joining the Royal Societies of Australia, along with our New South Wales counterpart. This followed negotiation between New South Wales and the Australian Academy of Science that confirmed that the Academy would welcome the reinvigoration of the RSA, with a mission to focus on science outreach as distinct from elite science. The Academy is providing office space and a part-time coordinator. John Hardie, principal of RSA and a member of our own Society, was receptive to recommendations for amendments to the draft constitution. It is proposed that the RSA will organise a significant event on “stewardship of country” in the first half of 2020, probably in Canberra to secure a national audience.

FINAL WORDS

The steady rise in membership numbers during the year suggests that Council's policy of strengthening the Society through activities has been successful. Particularly welcome is the broad scope of fields of interest of the new members.

During the year, Council repeatedly revisited the question of what distinctive role it can offer in a fractured external policy environment that seems to place low value on scientific authority. This question repeatedly came to the fore during its deliberations over Rangelands science and policy; and in particular when AgForce, our co-organiser, took a public pugnacious approach towards the Queensland Government, and in particular towards the science of the Great Barrier Reef.

Council has repeatedly confirmed the view that the Society has a unique role, as it can offer all of the following to Queensland public debate:

- cross-disciplinary, not wedded to any single knowledge specialty;
- non-partisan, not associated with any political faction;

- non-conflicted, not beholden to any commercial interests or dependent upon funding from government or any other sponsor;
- not limited in its examination of issues by economic or any other orthodoxy.

These features of the Society's profile give it confidence to continue to offer its capacity for reflection and analysis on issues such as Rangelands. As for the previous year, this is hampered by its inability to tap into a source of funding to allow it to underpin the work of its volunteers with executive capability.

If anything, the policy environment seems to have deteriorated during the year, and the lack of scientific literacy by participants in public debates, especially the climate debate, is more obvious. More than ever, it appears that it is incumbent upon scientists to reach out into the policy arena to bridge the shortfall.

Council thanks all those members who have attended events, have communicated by email and telephone, and have contributed to upholding the value of independent knowledge. We appeal to all members to renew their affiliation when the time arises.

Date: 15 November 2019

