

Royal Society of Queensland Annual Report 2020-2021

Overview

This report covers the period from 16 November 2020 to 30 October 2021. The Society's work program has been less intensive than in the previous year. Uncertain, variable restrictions on movements of personnel on account of COVID-19 have discouraged the Society from attempting to convene face-to-face meetings.

Just as Council reported last year, the Society remains in excellent intellectual health but precarious financial health.

Corporate Affairs

During the year the continued engagement of Mrs Pam Lauder as part-time (2-3 hours per week) Administration Coordinator and John Tennock on a retainer as Webmaster for both the Society's website and the Queensland Science Network (QSN) website have enhanced the Society's administrative capacity. John Brisbin continued as Webmaster of the Rangelands Queensland website. Tony Van Der Ark has continued as Membership Coordinator. Dr Anne-Marie Smit resigned as Royal Society Newsletter Coordinator on account of a career transfer to New South Wales. Col Lynam continued as Editor of the Queensland Science Network Newsletter and took up the role of Coordinator of the Research Fund. Ms Shannon Robinson, Queensland Museum's Librarian, continued in her role as Society's Honorary Librarian.

A/Prof. Julien Louys of Griffith University offered to fulfil the position of Honorary Editor, responsible for the annual issue, volume 129, of the *Proceedings*. This does not include editing the long papers produced under Rangelands initiative (q.v.).

The Royal Society of Queensland Council

The Council elected at the Annual General Meeting on 10 December 2020 comprised Angela Arthington, Heather Douglas, Geoff Edwards as Vice-President, Communications and Policy, Andy Grodecki, James Hansen as Secretary, Ross Hynes as President, Trevor Love, Col Lynam as QSN Newsletter Editor and Joseph McDowall as Treasurer.

No face-to-face meetings of Council were held this year. Three meetings were held by Zoom – on 4 March, 12 August and 23 September 2021. Most issues are debated via email traffic, telephone and Zoom.

Finances

The Society exhausted its accumulated reserves during the reporting year, primarily to fund the publication of its *Proceedings*. The officers have been unsuccessful in securing significant general-purpose sponsorship.

The Society's banking accounts are in the process of being consolidated and transferred from the Commonwealth Bank to Bank Australia. The requirement for two signatories for cheques remains. Internet transfers can now be set up remotely by two authorised Councillors (whereas the Commonwealth Bank insisted on two signatories' being in a Branch at the same time). This has streamlined and expedited payments as well as access to banking records. Membership fees were reviewed and a new structure established as well as provision for Supporter categories. The practice of supplying free copies of the *Proceedings* has been reviewed. Members can access this information electronically cost-free, but members desiring print copies are now charged for them. Adherence to the style guide for the *Proceedings* is now to be more strictly enforced. Authors

whose papers require exceptional additional editorial work and complex typesetting now are expected to pay the additional costs involved in preparing for publication.

Membership Roll

At 30 October 2021, the Society has 133 paid up and honorary members, one more than as reported last year. There are seven Honorary Life Members: Dr A. Bailey, Dr J. S. Jell, Dr J. O'Hagan, Ms C. Melzer, Prof. C. Rose, Mr Craig Walton and Prof Dilwyn Griffiths. Science lost Prof. R Specht, Honorary Life Member, during the year.

Council resolved to introduce a new form of voluntary financial support in Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze Supporterships, costing \$1000, \$500, \$250 and \$100 respectively. Several current and new members have taken out Supporterships and this has made a highly substantial difference to the Society's finances.

Annual General Meeting

For the first time the Annual General Meeting was held online, on Thursday 10 December 2020. Six members attended in addition to Council members.

Awards

Dr Russell Reichelt AO was honoured in the Australia Day awards 2021.

Members' Interests Page

A list of members with their fields of particular interest is available on the "Members' Only" page of our website. The purpose of this new facility is to allow members to identify other members with scholarly or curiosity-led interests matching their own. This page is accessible only by financial members of the Society via a password-protected login. The table is populated on an opt-in basis. By the end of the reporting year, only 19 members had availed themselves of this facility for networking. Responsibility for broad Society networking remains that of the office-bearers.

Information management

An offer by Councillor Col Lynam to prepare a knowledge management strategy, covering in particular the RSQ library, the archive of *Proceedings*, social media and the enduring items assembled for the Newsletters was accepted.

Publications

Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland

The annual issue of the *Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland*, volume 128 containing 11 refereed papers, was completed on time and printed in January 2021. Given that all articles are now available free of charge online, a reduction in the cost of printing copies for His Excellency our Patron's library, statutory deposits, Queensland Museum and other presentation purposes was expected. However, a decision to give free copies to all authors or lead authors reduced the savings.

There will be savings in future on the cost of posting complimentary copies to most of the subscribing overseas libraries, who were advised during the year that all articles are now available online. International free exchanges have been scaled back with only four International Free Exchanges and six Australian Free Exchanges receiving printed copies.

The *Proceedings* are uploaded to six different sites including Informit; BHL Biodiversity Heritage Library; Scopus (BD Elsevier); State Library of Queensland; the National Library and CrossRef.

Life Members are sent free copies of the Annual Proceedings as Council Members. With the introduction of Membership Supporters those who pay Platinum (receive a free copy for three years); Gold (for two years) and Silver (one year). There are eight Standing Orders including three internationals. There is a Master List of recipients now available for the distribution of the Proceedings.

A Special Issue on *Preventative Health* has been foreshadowed but will be delayed. Volume 129, the 2021 annual issue, is on track to be completed and printed by the end of the year.

On the advice of its Honorary Editor, during the year the Society registered as a member of CrossRef, the international NGO that assigns DOI numbers (document object identifiers). All articles published in future *Proceedings* will be accompanied by a DOI. The Society was gratified to receive advice from the National Museum, Victoria, which is managing a project on behalf of the Biodiversity Heritage Library, USA to apply DOI numbers, that it would work through our archive of *Proceedings* back to its origin to assign DOI numbers at no charge to the Society.

Newsletters

Fourteen Members' Newsletters were produced during the reporting period, against a target of monthly communications. These Society Newsletters are privileged to Members. All Newsletters are available on a members-only section of the website. The mailout software reports that only about half of the members open their Newsletter email and fewer click on the link that downloads the PDF.

With issue Number 7 of the Newsletter for the Queensland Science Network, completed in August, 2021, this Newsletter reached its anniversary. The Newsletter continues to receive warm praise. The QSN Newsletter is distributed to leaders of the member groups with an invitation to pass it on to their mailing lists. It is also published on the QSN website <https://scienceqld.org/category/member-groups/>. About 27 members of the general public have subscribed. Given that this is a newsletter of general science with now an established track record (issue Number 8 was distributed during October 2021), it is considered appropriate to embark on wider advertising to broaden the distribution and improve knowledge of the activities of the 26 member groups. A descriptive announcement was sent to the Department of Education with a request to distribute to teachers in the public and private school networks. A regular feature now of the Newsletter is a listing of other newsletters, which by itself is a valuable scientific resource.

Occasional Papers

Council resolved to open a line of peer-reviewed "Occasional Papers" for scholarly-type articles that did not fit the format that made them eligible for the annual *Proceedings*, or were outside its scope. Council had in mind in particular, the half-dozen long papers written for the Rangelands initiative in October 2020.

Education project

No progress was made during the year on development of new materials for the senior Queensland science curriculum as no funding was secured.

Events and Activities

On 15 June 2021, a reception was hosted at Government House by our Patron, His Excellency the Governor of Queensland, the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC CVO, to officially launch the five volumes of *Proceedings* published in 2020, and to invest Prof Dilwyn Griffiths and Past President Mr Craig Walton as Honorary Life Members.

INSERT FIGURE 1

An online themed members-discussion on origins science scheduled for 27 July was postponed to allow further refinement of the discussion paper that is to serve as the basis for the debate. The second in what Council hopes to be a series of themed discussions was held on 21 October on the proposal for an Office of Science Quality Assurance (see Commentary below). A third on carbon trading and the Land Restoration Fund was scheduled for November.

Dr Geoff Edwards and Dr Peter Dart made presentations on 3 September at a Griffith University online and virtual workshop *Repairing the Environmental Deficit in the Land Management Sector* organised by members Dr Philippa England and Dr Nelson Quinn.

Rangelands Policy Dialogue

The Rangelands Policy Dialogue launched in July 2019 was paused at the end of December 2020, following a workshop on 21 December attended by some 20 invited guests. The workshop was held at Griffith University, Southbank, per kind favour of Dr Philippa England and colleague Ms Melanie Davies. This workshop was recorded and summarised by Dr Peter Dart.

The online discussion group remains open. However, participants were advised that the discussion was being placed on hold to allow the Society to assemble sufficient funds to engage a remunerated executive officer, as the initiative warranted full-time executive support and because the capacities of the office-bearers of the Society were required for other initiatives.

At the end of the reporting year no funds had been sourced for this purpose, and the Dialogue remains in limbo.

Stewardship of country

The Society participated actively in the organising of a series of webinars in February-March 2021 by the Royal Societies of Australia, with three members (John Brisbin, Dr Geoff Edwards, Dr Nelson Quinn) serving as members of the steering committee and John Brisbin acting as master of ceremonies. Some of the presentations were subsequently edited and published by the Royal Society of Victoria.

Commentary

On 1 July 2021 *Queensland Country Life* featured a provocative opinion piece “Fear, not facts, now shapes views of most” by the CEO of AgForce arguing in favour of a new Office of Science Quality Assurance to validate all scientific input to public policy-making. The President responded with a rebuttal published as a Letter to the Editor on 22 July, leading to another column by the CEO on 3 August and another Letter to the Editor by the President on 10 August. The theme of an Office of Science Quality Assurance was the subject of the online meeting of members on 21 October.

RSQ and QSN Websites

During the year the pro bono developer of the Society’s website advised that they wished to surrender the site and transfer the code to our own host server, HostPapa.com. This was done successfully with no disruption to the online presence.

The site is written in WordPress and the version used had not been updated since establishment. Following enquiries, Society engaged Johanna Follett of Net Duet to update the version, a process that required an experienced WordPress developer as it ran the risk of breaking our

membership roll, payments gateway, *Proceedings* archive and search engine. Ms Follett has offered to complete the task pro bono.

Webmaster John Tennock has advised that it is time to review the structure of the site as it has some awkward features including unnecessary duplication. An invitation to members (via the Newsletter) to contribute suggestions towards a revamping of the site did not attract any feedback.

Research Fund

Consistent with the commitment in 2018 to fund grants in three successive years, a fourth round of grants to a value of \$5,000 was announced, closing on 30 October. A charitable bequest from the estate of the late Prof Trevor Clifford for another \$5,000 was received. Council resolved to expend this amount rather than add it to the reserve. It is uncertain whether this will be via a special Round 5 or via award to a second winner from Round 4. The capital reserve of \$40,000 remains intact. Council records its thanks to the Coordinator and to two members who offered to serve as technical assessors.

There is a requirement, from the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC), for the Society to expend at least \$8,800 per annum from its Research Fund every year from 2021-2022. The legislation, introduced in 2010, also requires a minimum of 4% of total Research Funds to be expended each year if 4% exceeds \$8,800.

Final Words

Despite the best efforts of the dedicated members of Council and other office-bearers and the membership at large, the year has seen several significant disappointments. Regulated restrictions on movements have discouraged the Society from holding face-to-face meetings. Our inability to secure funding to continue the Rangelands Policy Dialogue in a vigorous manner has discouraged us from continuing to drive the Dialogue through relying on volunteer effort. Our inability to secure general-purpose funding support has discouraged us from taking on new initiatives with uncertain financial cost.

The Society's situation is of course not unique. The year has seen significant financial deterioration in the budgets of Australian universities and this has flowed through to reduced budgets for curiosity-led scientific research. With unprecedented transformations occurring in the biophysical world, the need for enhanced research capacity in the natural and social sciences is more urgent than ever.

On a broader scale, the continuing arrival of new evidence of accelerating climate change and the dire effects it is having on natural ecosystems highlights the gap between the Society's earnest capacity to disseminate scientific information and the capacity of policy-makers to heed scientific advice. Despite the increased urgency of a focused policy response, the year has not seen the emergence of any entity in Queensland willing to perform the role of scientific and policy coordination that, for example, the Society pursued in 2019 and 2020 through the Rangelands Policy Dialogue. Policy responses to the major challenges of our times remain inadequate and the potential role that the Society can serve on behalf of Queensland science remains unfulfilled.

On behalf of all RSQ members, I extend our thanks to all who have been involved in the Society's activities in the past year. I end the year in hope that the need for effective generation and transmission of scientific knowledge will impress itself on those with capacity to fund these essential activities during the year ahead.