

## NEWS FROM COUNCIL

A change to the Laws of the Association, the acquisition of a President Elect for 2010, the difficult 'delivery' of a new Specialist Group and the approval of a new Convenor form the main items of this report. The persuasive powers of Professor Mike Jeger following the July meeting of Council obtained the agreement of Professor Trevor Hocking to be nominated for President Elect at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 11 September. The AGM was held in association with the conference entitled Resource Capture by Crops at Sutton Bonington. Trevor was duly elected and will take over as Vice President of the Association from Mike on 1 January 2009. Trevor has been a staunch supporter of the Association in the very recent past as a Convenor of a Specialist Group and as Programme Secretary. Mike has been very busy as Vice President and will begin a very busy two year spell as President of the Association from the beginning of January when Professor Peter Lea will stand down with the satisfaction of a job well done. Peter will continue as an Editor of *Annals of Applied Biology* and, it is to be hoped, as an author of further highly cited papers for the journal. The change in the Laws agreed at the Special General Meeting (SGM), immediately preceding the AGM, has resulted in the separation of duties, previously undertaken by Professor Martin Parry as Chairman of the Editorial Boards, into the duties of an Editor-in-Chief of *Annals of Applied Biology* and a Publications Officer, who will be a member of Council and a Trustee. Professor Jari Valkonen of the University of Helsinki has agreed to take on the position of Editor-in-Chief of *Annals of Applied Biology*. Martin has agreed to continue as a member of Council to oversee the Association's publications as Publications Officer while a search is conducted for a replacement to be elected at the 2009 AGM. The Publications Officer will be a member of the Management Committees for both *Annals of Applied Biology* and *Plant Biotechnology Journal*, will advise on the content and progress of *Aspects of Applied Biology* and the *DPV*, and also edit the Newsletter. There will no longer be a separate officer called Newsletter Editor so the size of Council will be decreased by one. The Council regards the Publications Officer as vital to the future success of the Association's publications and recognises that a person with experience of the writing, editing and publishing of scientific papers is needed. Suggestions from members of the Association will be most welcome in identifying a suitable candidate.

Dr Wayne Martindale has agreed to act as Convenor of a Food Systems Specialist Group and came along to the Annual General Meeting with a list of likely members of the Committee. Much credit is due to Dr Elizabeth Stockdale for encouraging the formation of this new group and for hosting an inaugural meeting within the Cropping and the Environment Specialist Group. Wayne will begin his term on the Council from the beginning of January.

Following the decisions of Council at the July meeting,

there was a hectic time to prepare the agendas for the SGM and the AGM and the necessary changes to the programme for the Resource Capture by Crops conference. Despite all the preparation and planning there was a need for frantic activity by Carol Millman to assemble enough members of the Association to provide a quorum. Annual General Meetings and Special General Meetings of learned Societies have always to compete with the more attractive core scientific activities. One wonders whether it would be easier to assemble a quorum if cream teas or free beer were available for the duration of these gatherings which are, after all, arranged to obtain agreement of the general membership to the forward path of the Association.

The November Council meeting took place at Rothamsted Research on 19 November concurrently with the conference on Applied Aspects of Aerobiology. A major item on the agenda was the draft of a robust strategy for improving the financial position of the Association. This was made all the more significant because of the worldwide financial problems that have arisen since Professor Jeger agreed to formulate a strategy for the term of his presidency. The Office and various members of the Council have agreed to explore possible actions on each of fourteen points outlined in the strategy and to report back to Council their recommendations of actions needed to produce a balanced budget by the end of 2010. Although no one can predict the course of the economic downturn, it will affect the extent to which the Association can rely on income from its investments and the amount of capital available to make up shortfalls on normal operations. The Treasurer is taking all steps possible to mitigate the effects of the downturn on investment capital and income.

There is considerable enthusiasm among several members of the Council for forming a subgroup for education. In the discussion at the Council meeting it was proposed to organise events for schoolchildren and undergraduates to encourage interest in applied biology. A member of the Association engaged in teaching in schools will strengthen the subgroup.

Some decisions of Council have to be made by e-mail. A recent example happened between the July and November meetings of the Council when it was decided by eleven to one replies that a member's handbook should not be produced. This decision was endorsed at the Council meeting. The reason given in the majority of replies was cost saving but it was also recognised that most information is readily available in up to date form on the website, including the list of Members (available to Members only) whereas a handbook produced every two years would quickly become out of date.

*Alf Keys, December 2008*

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