

## President's Report – Soil Science Australia AGM, 8 December 2020

Firstly, I would like to thank you all for choosing to be a member of Soil Science Australia and helping our Society, as the national peak body for soil professionals, thrive as we move into our 66<sup>th</sup> year of service.

2020 has been a challenging year for us all with the global COVID-19 pandemic disrupting our lives and livelihoods. Rest assured Soil Science Australia has survived and indeed thrived in this challenging year and is in a sound organisational and financial position.

Firstly some thanks and acknowledgements to our team. Soil Science Australia is a volunteer organisation which benefits hugely from the service of excellent people in our various branch and committee leadership positions. With 2020 being such a challenging year, I give sincere thanks to all those who have actively contributed to the running of our organisation. I extend huge gratitude to my amazing *Federal Executive*: A/Prof Vanessa Wong as Vice-President, Darren Kidd as Secretary, Dr Ashlea Doolette as Treasurer, Michael Walker as Executive Officer and Kathryn Walker in our Federal Office, I have really enjoyed working with you all. I also thank all our Branch Presidents on *Federal Council*: Dr Maryam Esfandbod and past-president Dr Aaditi Dang (QLD), Dr John Triantifilis (NSW), Dr Jason Condon (Riverina), Edward Scott (SA), Robyn Doyle (TAS), Dr Samantha Grover (VIC) and Henry Smolinski (WA). I would also like to acknowledge the many Branch committee members and supporters who have volunteered to assist with branch events.

Thank you to CPSS Officer, Dr Katharine Brown and the CPSS Board Chair, Dr JP Cummings, members of the CPSS Board and CPSS assessors David Nash and Cameron Grant for continuing to grow and maintain our flagship accreditation program.

I want to acknowledge our Training Committee, led by excellent Chair, Bernie Powell, with his unwavering commitment and focus which has proved invaluable as we have really strengthened this critical area of our Society in 2020.

I would also like to acknowledge the 2020 and now 2021, Cairns Conference Committee chaired by Prof. John Bennett which has faced down major challenges with running our national conference scheduled this year. I also would like to thank the 2020 Soil Judging Committee chaired by Dr Andrew Biggs who due to COVID circumstances, ran our first virtual soil judging event a few weeks ago.

Thank you very much to our talented Calendar Committee, (chaired by Dr Aaditi Dang with great support by Tim Overheu and Dr Deb Pritchard). I am sure you will be impressed with the 2021 calendar which will arrive shortly.

I also pay tribute to Peter Bacon, Dr Tapas Biswas, Dr Richard Greene and Dr Nilantha Hulugalle, who have continued working onwards from the 2018 Conference curating a special issue of the Soil Research Journal that will be out shortly.

Despite external challenges with COVID-19, I am pleased to report 2020 has been a very productive year for Soil Science Australia, packed with achievement and I would like to share some highlights with you today.

There were four strategic pillars in our [2020-2021 Strategic Plan](#) — Advocacy, Education, Community and Accreditation. I will report highlights and achievements in each of these areas below.

## Advocacy

When I was elected Federal President two years ago, I promised a stronger focus on external engagement to communicate the value of soils and soil science to the community. This was also aimed to benefit our members; if soils are a higher priority in government and community, then soil professionals will benefit from increased investment and opportunity. Some highlights:

- Soils are now high on the national agenda and Soil Science Australia is playing a key role in this. Only last week I had the pleasure of attending a Parliamentary Friends of Soil Group launch in Canberra co-chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Hon. Michael McCormack and Hon. Linda Burnie and attended by other Senior Ministers from the Agriculture (Hon. David Littleproud), Energy (Hon. Angus Taylor) and Environment (Hon. Sussan Ley) portfolios. We had the pleasure of meeting other parliamentarians, including many dignitaries from our soils community and our key soil organisation partners the Soils CRC and Soils For Life. There was a clear bipartisan recognition of the importance of soils and commitment for further action and investment to protect our most valuable natural asset.
- We have also been pleased to engage at an executive and branch level with the new National Soils Advocate and our Patron Hon. Penelope Wensley AC, who will be a great advocate for soils and soil science.
- Our Executive team has had several meetings with the National Soil Strategy team where we indicated our strong support for this Strategy, but advocated for increased focus on capacity building and training in it.
- We released our second snapshot of Australian soil issues via our [Save Our Soils campaign](#). The snapshot was developed in partnership with many Soil Science Australia members and industry stakeholders. Key messages from the report not only highlighted the top threats facing our soils including increasing drought and bushfires, erosion, contamination, urban encroachment, salinisation and sodification, acidification and also provided recommendations for a way forward to tackle these challenges collaboratively. Encouragingly, there was great progress on recommendations we made in last's year snapshot.
- We accelerated our social media presence through the primary platform of Twitter which has increased to 3876 followers (up 20%).
- Our Executive Officer, Michael Walker, was elected the Agriculture and Food Cluster Representative on key science sector group, Science and Technology Australia, which represents over 80,000 science professionals across Australia.
- We have participated as an observer in meetings of the Australian Soils Network (ASN) and the National Committee for Soils and Terrain (NCST), strengthening our collaboration with key governmental soil committees.

## Education

- The upside of the COVID-19 situation is that our Society has rapidly expanded our online information delivery, in particular **multiple webinars** organised from the Federal and Branch levels which have proven very popular. I would like to thank all the webinar presenters, attendees, and the Branches for sharing their webinars across Australia. This model is one that should continue into the future post-COVID-19 as it helps build our integrated soils community and capacity.
- A Basic **Soils Refresher Course** was delivered online by Bernie Powell, Dennis Baker and myself in November. This was extremely well attended with over 100 registrations and very positive feedback.
- Our team also delivered several exciting new online resources for members via a new [online training resource landing page](#) this includes:



- ✓ A [Soils Education and Online Resources webpage](#) that contains links to online soil-related resources from Australia and globally. The SA Branch has led this initiative and you will see it also includes several new short videos on identifying soil horizons, testing soil pH, sodicity and salinity, field texturing and non-wetting soils. Let us know other online information or links you would like to see on this page.
  - ✓ A new [National Inventory of Soil Science Teaching](#) (searchable database and report) was compiled. Soil Science Australia in collaboration with the Australian Soil Network and the University of Southern Queensland has developed this inventory to provide information to students, support the on-going development of soil science educators and to highlight and facilitate the need for professional development in soil science.
  - ✓ Our [Soils in Schools](#) materials have been refreshed and we contracted an education consultant to complete a roadmap of the way forward to expand this program and integrate it into the national schools curriculum.
  - ✓ If you need to access soil data and maps check our [Soils Data, Maps and Information Sources](#) webpage. This was formed in conjunction with the NCST and is your key gateway to soil data and map sources collected by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.
  - ✓ The first module (Soil Chemistry) of a **new online eLearning training course** is also near completion and members will have access to this via our website. Further modules are planned to be delivered in 2021.
- The development of online training courses will continue into 2021 with key content only accessible to members. This has been made possible by the transition of our member system to our website which will continue to be developed and improved over the coming year.

## Community

- Our member community has shown its resilience this year and our membership numbers are strong (>12% up on last year) which is particularly pleasing given the additional financial pressures many people are under and our inability to run the National Soils Conference and many branch events as we normally would.
- However, as mentioned above, the COVID-19 situation also created the opportunity to transition to increased online events by our branches and sharing of these with other branches. This has been highly successful to build our sense of community and maintain connections with each other.
- The recent virtual soil judging event ran by Dr Andrew Biggs (CPSS) and colleagues was an innovative and successful example of adapting to change to benefit our members. Congratulations to the NZ team which took out the overall event win, with the University of Southern Queensland team winning the Bennison trophy for best Australian team.
- The Cairns 2021 Conference Committee led by Prof John Bennett also ran a very successful online World Soil Day event that followed from an excellent Queensland AGM function which was held face to face. The Cairns conference next June-July promises to be a fantastic gathering with a diverse program and I hope you can all attend.
- I congratulate all the persons who will shortly receive our Soil Science Australia awards and also all nominees for these awards.
- This year I also released our first [statement on Reconciliation Day](#) recognising the importance of increasing indigenous knowledge and engagement in soil science and with soil scientists. We also committed to developing a Reconciliation Action Plan which is now in progress.

- Unfortunately, this year there was the passing of esteemed soil scientist and friend to many of our members, Dr Philip Moody from the Queensland Branch. Phil was awarded the Public Service Medal (PSM) in the 2017 Australia Day Awards in recognition of his outstanding service to the environmental sector. Phil's legacy includes improved soil and water quality management, nutrient use efficiency, standards in soil testing and sustainable agricultural productivity. His knowledge and applied skills in soil processes and water quality have improved the evidence-base for policy making, influenced the design of government policies, improved sustainability and profitability of landholders and importantly, inspired a new generation of scientists and students.
- Behind the scenes, our Federal Office team and Executive have been working hard to improve the governance, IT, communications and financial systems in our Society. This largely unseen work in the "sub-soil" of the Society is incredibly important and is placing our Society well for its sustainability and success into the future.

### Accreditation

- Our CPSS program is going from strength to strength with around 130 members and several current applicants. I would encourage you to consider applying for this accreditation which is increasingly being recognised as the gold standard required to ensure the quality of soil professionals.
- Our CPSS Officer, Dr Katharine Brown, has been leading the development of the eLearning course mentioned earlier, which is aligned to CPSS Fundamentals Exam competencies. We hope this will assist and encourage more members to achieve CPSS accreditation.
- In 2021 there are plans to develop clearer pathways with allied professions such as engineering and environmental science and firmly embed CPSS as a mandatory requirement for major government and industry projects.
- A Registered Soil Practitioner micro-accreditation scheme is also under active consideration by the Federal Executive, Council, CPSS and Training Boards. This will provide members with the ability and training to receive accreditation for specific soil science areas (e.g. soil sampling, carbon accounting, farm soil nutrition) with a requirement to undertake ongoing professional development in these areas.

In summary, I feel we, as a team, have achieved a great deal in 2020 despite a very difficult external situation with the COVID-19 impacts. I offer my heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to this. Soil Science Australia is a non-profit organisation that is heavily reliant on volunteers. Becoming involved as a volunteer often brings tangible benefits such as new soil friends, knowledge and opportunities that come from benefitting others and I would encourage you to keep helping us to help you.

Finally, it has been a great privilege to serve you as Federal President of Soil Science Australia over the last two years and I look forward to assisting the incoming Executive to make a smooth transition and continuing to volunteer my time to help Soil Science Australia into the future. I wish you all health and happiness over the Christmas period and into 2021.

Yours sincerely,



Assoc. Prof. Luke Mosley, CPSS

**Federal President Soil Science Australia**

