

## **PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS to the 43rd Conference, 1990**

R.P. POTTINGER

Like the ten commandments, the objectives of the NZWPCS are clearly spelt out and members of the Society easily identify with them. But how often as a Society have we reviewed their validity in the rapidly changing political, commercial, research and social environment that we face in 1990, the beginning of a new decade and the vanguard of the twenty-first century?

Within my research organization a revolution in science management is taking place and we have been exposed to management processes and techniques foreign to our "on-the-job" training of the past; graduates of the 'University of Life'. This Society must critically and regularly examine itself in order to recognize its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to its viability, and from such a "SWOT analysis" chart its course to ensure its future success.

Last week I attended the Ninth Australian Weeds Conference in Adelaide and with the help of New Zealand delegates I completed a "SWOT analysis" on our Society. Some of the outcomes were surprising and reminded me as President of this Society that the Society and its Executive need to be more resourceful in setting clear short-term and long-term goals, objectives, and action plans, in order to lift our performance and project the Society into a position of strength in the rapidly changing environment that we are now part of.

The strengths of the NZWPCS separated into four definable categories are:

1. Membership
2. Management, including the executive functions, goals, style of the Society and public relation (PR) releases.
3. Services provided by the Society. These include: publications, member training in public presentation, extension of plant protection knowledge, facilitation of conferences, and field day activities.
4. External environment influences, including: collaboration and competition with other Societies, employee organizations, government and its associated public service organisations (such as MORST, FORST, MFE), non-government funding organizations, lobby groups and the news media.

For the purposes of this address I will not outline the specific strengths or weaknesses of the Society, or the threats to it, but will outline some of the opportunities revealed by the analysis.

Within Australasia, and even on a world-wide basis the NZWPCS is a unique scientific Society, being both applied and multi-disciplinary, the outcomes respectively, of:—

1. The failure of classical scientific Societies to provide an adequate forum for applied science in New Zealand.
2. The small size of New Zealand's population which restricts potential membership for each of our component disciplines, namely; weed science, entomology, plant pathology and vertebrate pest control.

To be able to lead plant protection research and technology development and remain at the forefront of public credibility, the Society and its Executive must continually consider the opportunities available, prioritise them, strive for excellence in achievement and publicise the outcomes. It must also lead representations on behalf of plant protection researchers, technologists and extensionists. Well what are some of the opportunities available to the Society?

### **1. Membership**

There is an obvious opportunity to increase membership particularly by attraction of students of applied biology; consultants and advisors, including Noxious Plants Officers and Stock and Station agency extension specialists; fringe-area scientists whose interest partly encompass plant protection; and professional pest control operators.

Hand in hand with this is the chance for development of stronger more active branches strategically located through the country.

### **2. and 3. Management and services provided by the Society**

The Society can clearly improve in these areas by giving more attention to the opportunities available to it and charting appropriate courses. The Executive could establish more objective plans in order to:

- a. Improve PR, particularly through the news media and amongst other scientific societies. Most applied biologists in Australia know little about our Society or its conferences.
- b. Sponsor public meetings and lectures in order to extend information on the appropriate and safe use of pesticides, or more particularly inform the public on the large number of environmentally acceptable control systems developed by members of our Society. Our Society is involved with development of biological, cultural, management and physical controls as well as chemical based approaches for which we are best known. More importantly members of this Society have led the development of non-pesticide controls for pests, weeds and plant pathogens; the implementation of integrated pest, disease and weed management systems; and the monitoring of pesticide residues on food, other primary produce and in the environment.
- c. Obtain more sustaining members to enhance the financial viability of the Society and increase contributions to the Society's Post-Graduate Student Scholarship Fund.
- d. Increase overseas sales of our annual Scientific Proceedings.
- e. Enhance publication opportunities for reference books on plant protection, in order to build on the success of "New Zealand Common Weeds in Colour". We have now printed 15,000 copies (the 3rd Printing) and have clearly hit on a low cost format acceptable to end users, thus providing a model for similar publications on invertebrate pests and plant pathogens, which are now in the planning stage. In essence, niche publications written by professionals.

In addition there is a definite opportunity for members of this Society to diversify research into such areas as:

- a. Vertebrate pest biology and control.
- b. Environment interactions with agriculture.
- c. New generation, environmentally soft pesticides.
- d. Development of organic and sustainable agricultural systems.
- e. Biotxin-free foodstuffs and environments.
- f. Plant resistance to pests and diseases.
- g. Biotechnology.
- h. Refined Integrated Pest, Disease and Weed Management Systems.
- i. More definitive survey data on 'pests' and damage level data to clearly define the national importance of 'pest species' and identify to the public the large economic gains possible by effective 'pest control' procedures.
- j. Accumulation of more authoritative ecological and physiological data bases for 'pest species', whether invertebrates, vertebrates, plant and animal pathogens or weeds.

Greater collaboration is clearly possible with environmentalists, users of pesticide and biotoxin-free foods, and the primary production industry in regard to both plant protection research and extension.

### **4. External environment influences**

The Society clearly has an opportunity to:—

- a. Guide and direct plant protection research and extension, perhaps by indirect ways. For example, by presenting plant protection needs and opportunities to: the Foundation of Research, Science and Technology (FORST); Producer Boards; Environment Organizations; Divisional Directors of Research; and commercial industries involved in primary production processing and marketing.
- b. Act as an effective plant protection advocate and advisor to politicians; the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MORST), the Ministry for

Environment, Regional Governments and Authorities and Primary and Secondary Industries.

- c. Present a more positive image on the directions and outcomes of plant protection research to the general public.
- d. Lobby for more effective support of science by governments in New Zealand.

Recently Professor Denis Noble of Oxford University and founder of Save British Science (SAS) was quoted in the New Zealand Herald (11.8.90) on the importance of generous government funding for scientific research and development. This is a matter of national consequence to New Zealand. Many New Zealand scientists have spoken on this subject, but generally their viewpoints have been rarely highlighted by the media. Professor Noble emphasized that the leading western economies such as West Germany and Japan spend almost 3% of Gross National Product (GNP) on research and technology development (RTD), even though specific commercial outcomes maybe a decade or more away. Such countries know and accept that being at the forefront of science is essential to maintenance and/or improvement of their technologically based economies. In contrast, New Zealand spends less than 1.1% of GNP on RTD each year; suicide for a country with an economy more distant than any other from international markets, reliant on sales of primary products at the upper quality end of the market range and which is desperately attempting to diversify its industrial base.

This Society has a duty to its members to continually remind government of the consequences of inadequate funds for RTD in plant protection and likewise the inadequate salaries paid to scientific high performers and for recruitment of the best university graduates into RTD. It seems unfair and inappropriate that a first year police constable currently earns \$37,655 per year, considerably more than a scientist with a first class honours degree, a PhD, and at least six years service can earn. Likewise why are police sergeants (\$48,097) and senior police sergeants (\$53,781) paid in excess of many career scientists at the peak of their careers?

New Zealand is currently achieving what it has invested in science, a depressed economy!

No Society can thrive as well as ours does, without a committed Executive. All have freely given their time and energy, discharging tasks on behalf of the Society with professionalism, reflecting your confidence in electing them to office. I thank them all for their contributions. In particular, I thank Alison Popay, our hard working and efficient secretary and editor, who has fulfilled her responsibilities, in addition to caring for her family and her responsibilities as a scientist. The Society is greatly indebted to her. I also thank Mr Brian Smith for agreeing to join the executive to replace Mr Colin Sharpe who resigned to take up a new position with Dow-Elanco in Australia.