



## New Zealand Grassland Association Inc

### NZGA PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011-12

*Jacqueline Rowarth*

Fuelled by science and tempered by experience, the New Zealand Grassland Association (NZGA) continues to provide a nexus – a core connecting farmers, industry, policy and research. Throughout the past 12 months members of the executive have worked with all sectors to make the nexus stronger. I hope that the work has been apparent to members through the communications. Although one member did reply to me at length, describing the messages from NZGA as 'relentless', he was positive about the interaction. It is the collective hope of the executive that the communications are considered to add value. They are written in response to member concerns or questions, and we are always happy to take direct requests for articles to cover specific topics. We are also happy to consider articles submitted for inclusion where they meet the criteria of being fuelled by science and tempered by experience.

An 'adding value' initiative this year is to fund postgraduate students to attend the conference. We have eight, some of whom are giving papers, and all of whom expressed commitment to interaction and learning. As part of their reward, they will be providing us with some words for the newsletter about what they learned at the conference, and why they would advise other students to get involved. We hope that by involving them when young, they will be with us for life. There is a precedent for this: I note that there are three people who were at the Balclutha conference as young scientists in 1988 and who are now on the NZGA Executive.

We will also be supporting NZGA farmer members to the International Grasslands Congress being held in Sydney next year (September 15<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>). There will be an application process, so watch for the call. Again, this is to add value for members – the successful recipients will be expected to report at the next NZGA Conference (Tauranga 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> November 2013).

Much of the focus of NZGA this year has been on the conference and proceedings. David Swain, now based in Australia, has done sterling work on putting them together. He is now suggesting a change in system, and the outcome of the suggestions will determine whether he is or isn't prepared to be editor next year. The challenges for him this year have been mostly in people not meeting deadlines, and this reflects that fact that we are all extremely busy, and have great intentions, but life is sometimes overwhelming.

In science the funding system is a *force majeure* – a superior force that the researcher can do little about. The system has been re-organised, again. Paul Stocks, from Ministry of Primary Industries, is the new head of the Science and Innovation group within the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. The fact that he is interested in agriculture is good news.

In agriculture the *force majeure* are multi. In addition to the droughts, floods, storms and biological incursions, the exchange rate and customer preference create problems for viability. At the end of 2011 farmer confidence was up. Rabobank reported that 65% of dairy farmers and 50% of sheep and beef farmers felt positively about viability. By June only 30% of dairy farmers and 22% of sheep and beef farmers felt that they were viable. And then the pay-out and schedules dropped further.

At Ministerial level there is considerable discussion about ‘bringing up the less-well-performing farmers’. Various Primary Growth Partnership programmes have a component of technology transfer within them to assist. But people have to want to change – and unless we can show that benefits of change outweigh the risks, nothing will happen. The farmers who are members of NZGA are not the ones that Minister Carter is concerned about. Our farming members have their eye on their business and on the horizon, watching for opportunities. They are also prepared to give of their expertise freely. We have several of these members on the executive, and we are collectively grateful for their input:

Anders Crofoot has managed NZGA in a co-opted role, as well as his commitments to Federated Farmers of New Zealand. He bridges NZGA into a knowledge base that might otherwise be difficult to achieve. Both he and Ashley Cole have been involved in FAME this year, adding to their portfolios of interaction. Ashley and Laurie Copland were elected to the Executive last year, and Laurie (who took over the last year of a three-year term of a resigning member) has served on the audit and risk committee. Laurie and Warren King are up for re-election this year; Warren has been the link to the International Grassland Congress Organising Committee. Graham Kerr has provided the industry perspective on the committee, and the science has been forthcoming from Warren and Dave Stevens. Dave’s work on the conference programme has been, again, tremendous.

Nelson and Fiona Hancox, and their local organising committee, with the assistance of Dave Stevens and Marie Casey, have worked to bring this conference together. Their pride in their district fuelled their enthusiasm and tempering from experience occurred... (It ALWAYS takes longer to load people on buses than anybody can believe.)

Marie Casey provides the executive support for NZGA, with Glenis Thomas on accounts (a relief to us all, and we are grateful for her timely dealing with matters that arise). Marie’s work is above and beyond the call of duty. She is a member and believes in the cause.

David Swain has done important work on the proceedings:

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*“Fuelled by science and tempered by experience”*

“I could, no doubt, make it easier for myself by being less pedantic (yes, there is a difference between a hyphen and an n-dash), but a lower standard publication would not be good for the NZGA image, or for my satisfaction.”

The executive agrees with him that standards are important and that he upholds them well to our collective benefit.

The last member of the Executive to be thanked is Vice President Warwick Lissaman, who provides encouragement, suggestions, and insights, as well as expertise in leading the audit committee. His input has been of huge value during the year, and his on-going interest in serving on the NZGA executive is reassuring. A better right-hand man would be difficult to imagine.

Finally to the sponsors who are vital to us. They are mentioned in several places in the programme and proceedings. They are part of the nexus bringing industry in direct contact with farmers and researchers for information exchange. The strength of NZGA lies in the teamwork at many levels, involving diversity in backgrounds, knowledge and perspectives to add value for members.

Long may the nexus continue... fuelled by science and tempered by experience.