

History of the Grassland Society of NSW – the first 25 years

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In 1968, an organisation, 'Men of the Land', initiated the first Grassland Society of NSW (Read et al. 1995). Their initial activity was a field day at Ingleburn on 1 December 1968. Chairman of the Society was Professor Hector Geddes and his committee: F. A. Varley, P. Gardiner, O. Carter, T. Atkinson, W. Paton, R. Hart and A. Fleck. Although 'Men of the Land' had 970 members it could not sustain the Grassland Society and it failed sometime between 1968 and the 1980s.

Birth of our Society

In 1983, Drew Wright, Principal Agronomist Pastures with The Department of Agriculture, canvassed support in country NSW and as a result an investigative committee met in Orange on 7 June 1984 and commissioned a survey of 270 landholders to ascertain whether a Grassland Society was a worthwhile venture and whether they would join, pay a membership fee of \$20, attend a two-day conference once a year and stand for election to committees. A brave 42 landholders expressed their interest and were invited to the inaugural meeting at the Royal Agricultural Society (RAS) showground in Sydney on 30 March 1985 (Read *et al.* 1995).

At this meeting chairman Hugh Ross, "Glengarry", Orange, supervised a successful motion from Drew Wright to form the Grassland Society of NSW and to elect the following: President, Peter Wrigley; Vice President, John Read; Secretary, Malcolm Campbell; Treasurer, Jim Dellow (elected later), Editors, Warren McDonald and Ray Ison; and Committee, Hugh Ross, Drew Wright, Jack Warner, Roger Dance, Sam Stephens, Frank Crofts and Stephen Millar.

The objects of the Society were to promote: the transfer of innovative information from leading landholders to other producers; the investigation of pasture problems; the incorporation of research findings into practice; the transmission of information in plain English (Hugh Ross and Jack Warner were keen of this) and the publication of pertinent information.

The Grassland Society of Victoria (25 years service and 800 members in 1985), the New Zealand Grassland Association (54 years service and 1000 members in 1985) and the Tropical Grassland Society assisted the birth of our Society by providing images to copy and practical guidance. Of these, the Grassland

Society of Victoria was closest to our concept because it was geared to landholder interest (65% producer members in 1985) whereas the other two Societies were concerned more with publication of scientific papers. The constitution of the Grassland Society of Victoria was used by John Read and Drew Wright as our model. The RAS, mainly through Hugh Ross, provided encouragement, meeting venues, our first President Peter Wrigley, as well as later help.

The first activity of the Society was a field day south of Orange and an inaugural dinner on 17 October 1985 both attended by 90 members. Guest of Honour at the dinner was Sir Laurence Street, Acting Governor of NSW and guest speaker was Roy Watts, Director General of the Department of Agriculture, both organised by the RAS. Roy Watts, taking a veterinarians aspect, provided a graphic account of the poisonous qualities of an avalanche of our best pastures species which challenged the very substance of our new Society and from which we only just survived.

Personnel

The Society has been sustained by volunteers on the executive (Table 1), conference and branch committees since the beginning. Outstanding service has been recognised by the endowment of six Life Memberships (Table 1). Every endeavour was made to enlist producer Presidents and to that end Peter Wrigley, Graham Brown, Stephen Millar, Haydn Lloyd-Davies (25% producer, 75% CSIRO scientist and professor at University of NSW) and John Coughlan were elected. John Read and Frank McRae were from the Department of Agriculture and Mick Duncan from industry. Originally the President's term was for three years, but in 2008 the constitution was amended to lengthen it.

Logo

Our logo was designed by John Read and professionally fashioned by an artist in the Department of Agriculture in 1986. In 1989, in response to an impassioned conference paper by Frank Crofts on the value of subterranean clover, a delegate at the AGM ‘moved’ that our logo and title be changed to represent the “Subterranean Clover Society of NSW”.

Conferences

Our first conference in 1986 at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, Richmond was attended by 180. Since then we have held conferences in 11 venues (Table 2) substantiating our aim to involve as many producers as possible in the Society. We held a joint conference with the Victorian Grassland Society at Albury in 2003 and our first coastal conference at Taree in 2009. Conferences are our shopfronts and provide leading producers the opportunity to deliver papers detailing their methods of running their properties. This is our most important contribution to agriculture as no other organisation provides this invaluable information. The producer papers deliver

practical and proven information that can be readily adapted by other producers to their properties. They have proved a major attraction, not only in substance but also in the entertainment provided by talented speakers. Papers from research and extension personnel and from industry augment these deliveries.

Conferences are also a platform for enlisting new members and for industry and government representatives to extend their information through posters and static displays. The conferences are organised by local committees that include: convenor, secretary, treasurer, editors, sponsorship, competitions, venue, catering, publicity, trade displays, tours, master of ceremonies and general committee, usually a team of 30 which means over our 25 years we have had 750 helpers.

A survey conducted at the 1997 conference in Dubbo revealed that 46% of the delegates were producers, 37% extension and research personnel, 11% teachers and students and 6% environmentalists. Delegates obtained details of the conference from: the newsletter 53%, the conference brochure 17%, word of mouth 16% and the media 14%.

Table 1. State Executives and Life Members over the first 25 years of the Grassland Society of NSW.

Presidents	Peter Wrigley 1985–88, Graham Brown 1988–91, John Read 1991–94, Stephen Millar 1994–97, Haydn Lloyd-Davies 1997–2000, Frank McRae 2000–03, John Coughlan 2003–05, Mick Duncan 2005 onwards
Secretaries	Malcolm Campbell 1985–2002, Nicolle Griffin and Rosemary Sweet 2002–04, Dianne Smith 2004–08, Janelle Witschi 2008 onwards
Treasurers	Jim Dellow 1985–2001, Howard Sinclair 2001–02, Greg Condon 2002–05, Linda Ayres 2005–09, Frank McRae 2009 onwards
Newsletter Editors	Warren McDonald 1985; Ray Ison 1985–1989; Alan Andrews 1989–1993, Drew Wright and David Michalk 1993–2001; Haydn Lloyd-Davies 2001–2009; Carol Harris 2009 onwards
Life Members	Hugh Ross, Peter Wrigley, Malcolm Campbell, Haydn Lloyd-Davies, Warren McDonald, Jim Dellow

Table 2. Conference venues over the first 25 years of the Grassland Society of NSW.

Venue	Year	Venue	Year
Orange	1987, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1998, 2005	Richmond	1986
Queanbeyan	1990, 1994, 1999, 2007	Gundagai	2001
Tamworth	1989, 1992, 2008	Forbes	2002
Armidale	1995, 2000	Albury	2003
Wagga	1996, 2006	Gunnedah	2004
Dubbo	1997, 2010	Taree	2009

Most conferences are profitable, but in 2000 we lost \$23,000 which emphasises the need for reserve funds to cover contingencies. In 2002, Haydn Lloyd-Davies rewrote David Kemp's 1988 instructions on how to run our conferences into 'Guidelines for Grassland Society of NSW Conferences'.

Other Societies

In 1989, it was resolved that the President of the Victorian Grassland Society, the NZ Grassland Association and the Tropical Grassland Society attend our conferences free of registration and dinner fees and proposed that membership fees be waived for members of those organisations. This arrangement was reciprocated by the three societies. In 1989, the Australian Wool Corporation invited eight of our members to a conference at Ballarat on weeds, insect pests and diseases of sheep pastures.

Poster presentations

In 2002, Haydn Lloyd-Davies instigated a scheme that allowed authors of posters a one-minute slot on the dais to present their case. Jim "Banjo" Virgona presented his Caucasian clover case in a one-minute rhyme, the last stanza reading 'Now it's come to the end of my ditty; I hope you're not bored, sleepy or upset; I'll tell you some more if you come over to chat; at my little poster, it's just up the back'.

Proceedings

Conference proceedings are circulated to members, libraries, Universities, TAFEs, schools and grassland organisations. In 1993, we had proceedings lodged in 27 libraries. In 2001, it was resolved that the Society keep two copies of each proceedings. Complete sets are now secure at Agricultural Research Centre, Orange, the National Library, Canberra, the State Library, Sydney and with the Secretary. In 2000, the proceedings from 1985–2001 were indexed by the secretary on a subject and author basis. Editor Carol Harris has redone this indexation and extended it to cover 1985 to 2009. A number of publishing houses, e.g. the Kondinin Group, reproduce papers from our proceedings.

Newsletter

Seven editors have produced the Newsletter since 1985 (Table 2). Between 1993 and 2001,

Drew Wright edited copy and then forwarded it to David Michalk for presentation. Full sets of newsletters are held at Agricultural Research Centre, Orange and with the Secretary.

Branches

In the late 1980s, Jack Warner insisted that we establish as many branches as possible and to that end branches started or sustained were: southern and northern tablelands; central, north-western and south-western slopes; central-western plains; Hunter and Lachlan Valleys, and Albury-Wodonga. Active branches held field days on a multitude of topics, e.g., the North-western slopes branch held one on tropical grasses at Purllewaugh in March 2010 which 150 people attended. Branches still operating in 2009 were: southern tablelands, northern tablelands, central and north-western slopes.

Committee members that ran these branches included: Peter Simpson, Noel Teys, Mike Keys, Hugh Dove, Col Langford, Ian McLean, John Coughlan, Warren McDonald, Stephen Millar, Lester McCormick, Mick Duncan, Rob Eccles, Alison Bowman, Jim Virgona, Carol Harris, Jeff Howe, Nigel Phillips and many others. Peter Simpson led the southern tablelands branch for 16 years after predicting in 1986 that such an organisation would not work; so, in effect, he laboured for 16 years to disprove his own theory. The presidents of branches were ex-officio members of the executive.

Membership

The founding membership of 28 (Read *et al.* 1995) increased to 80 by August 1985, to 250 by July 1986 and to 1200 in 1996. Thereafter there was a steady decrease to 450 by 2010.

Sponsorship

For all of our 25 years we have had immense assistance from sponsors in producing our conferences (e.g. 32 and 23 sponsors, respectively, in 2009 and 2010) and in subsidising our membership fees of \$50 per year (2010). Treasurer Linda Ayres analysed, that in 2006, sponsorship contributed 41% of our income compared with 49% from membership fees. Over the years sponsors have promoted competitions for: direct drilling, pasture quality and establishment, hay and silage, pasture and weed identification, and many others.

Specialties

The Society is non-political, but presented a balanced case to authorities in such negotiations as: the Native Vegetation and Conservation Act; lack of funding for research and extension; sustainment of aerial agriculture, and a number of other issues. The Society also sponsored publications such as: pasture species booklets; weed control in lucerne; pasture legumes and grasses, and others.

Scholarships

In 1996, President Stephen Millar announced that the Society would award a four-year scholarship to a member's son or daughter who was accepted by a University to study agriculture or veterinary science. There were few applications over the ensuing years, but those received were outstanding. Our first scholarship of \$1500 per year was awarded to Bruce Watson in 1997 to study agricultural science. Bruce had a stellar university career and was offered three jobs at graduation in 2000, taking one at Price Waterhouse, before returning to his property. Our second scholarship was awarded to Bruce's sister Katrina in 2000 to study agricultural science at Sydney University. After transferring to Marcus Oldham College she graduated with a Bachelor of Business in 2002.

Travel grants

In the first 25 years of the Society, over 30 grants were awarded on a budget of \$4000 per year with a maximum grant of \$2000 to an individual, but many of \$250 were awarded. Most grants were given to members to attend the Victorian Grassland Society or the NZ Grassland Association conferences, but other grants were made for International Grassland, Asian-Pacific Weeds and RAS conferences, study sojourns on pasture species, specialist pasture and animal production courses and many others. Recipients of travel grants were contracted to write a report for our conference proceedings and to present a verbal report at a conference. In 2005, Hugh Dove and his committee rewrote the by-laws governing travel grants originated by Jack Warner and his committee.

Fellowships

The first and only Grassland Society of NSW Fellowship was presented on 18 October 2000

to outstanding CSIRO scientist Alf Anderson fittingly, at the Boffin's Restaurant in Canberra. Alf discovered the effects of molybdenum on pasture growth.

Internet site

The first mention of establishing an internet site was made in 1997 and by 2000 Rob Eccles had organised an operator in Armidale to establish a site and provide upkeep. By 2001, our site was finished and incorporated with that of the Victorian Grassland Society. It was planned to set all papers and contents of proceedings on the site and sell papers for \$5 and proceeding for \$10. In 2005, Linda Ayres and Leah Lane organised a new site where, by 2010, papers or proceedings could be obtained through the secretary. In 2010, credit card facilities were established for paying subs, conference fees, etc.

Future

Our Society has been sustained for 25 years by volunteers from government, industry and producers. An estimate of the numbers involved in the executive and branch committees might come to 300. When added to the conference committee numbers of 750 (see above) it is evident that a large number of volunteers have supported the Society and its aims over this period.

It is essential that this support continues for our Society to prosper. However, with the demolition of personnel in the agricultural section of the Department of Primary Industries (previously Department of Agriculture), such support may be in jeopardy. In 2009, President Mick Duncan stated that, 'although it has been a tremendous partnership, we can't keep relying on the above department to the same extent as in the past'. Thus economies such as biennial conferences and other labour-saving strategies may have to be adopted.

Taking into account the above, there is now a greater need for the Grassland Society of NSW than ever before. So here's to the volunteers that will carry the Society to even greater heights over the next 25 years and beyond.

References

- Read JW, Wright WA, Campbell MH, McDonald WJ (1995) The birth of the Grassland Society of NSW. In 'Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference of the Grassland Society of NSW' p. 8. (NSW Grassland Society Inc.: Orange)



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