



SAAB President's Report – 2019

Stephen Boatwright

This year has been a good one for SAAB, although the Association again had to appoint a new Executive Secretary following the resignation of Ms Anche Louw at the end of 2018. She completed her term as Secretary after the SAAB conference in January 2019, but stayed on for a handover with the new secretary. Ms Elisabeth Geerts started in mid-January 2019 as the new Executive Secretary of the Association. This placed SAAB in a unique position to have a new President and a new Secretary start at the same time, as my term started after the January 2019 conference. Nonetheless, with the support of council we have managed to learn the ropes quickly.

Council

The 2019 SAAB council consisted of Prof. JS Boatwright (President), Dr P Hills (Vice-President/Outgoing President), Dr S-L Steenhuisen (Hon. Treasurer), Ms E Geerts (Executive Secretary), Prof. J van Staden (Editor-in-Chief, South African Journal of Botany), Dr N Ludidi, Dr M Greve (Portfolio: Student Council), Dr T van der Niet (Portfolio: SACNASP), Dr AR Magee (Portfolio: Conferences), Prof. G Goodman-Cron, Prof. A Moteetee and Prof. J Sebola (SANBI Representative).

Dr Paul Hills' (SU) term of office ends after the January council meeting, and he will be replaced by Dr Sjirk Geerts (CPUT) who was elected following a call for nominations during the latter part of 2019. The SAAB council is grateful to Dr Hills for his tremendous contribution to the Association in various capacities since 2011, including Hon. Treasurer, President and Vice-President. We of course also welcomed Elisabeth and hope that SAAB will benefit for many years from her dedicated service. Lastly Prof. Goodman-Cron was elected as Vice-President from January 2020, following a nomination and voting process. I wish her well in this new capacity, also as President from 2021-2023.

Student Council

Dr Michelle Greve has taken on the portfolio for the Student Council. From 2019 we have added to the list of duties for the Local Organising Committee (LOC) arranging the conference that a student LOC should be appointed to arrange a social event

during which students can get together. This will take place at the 2020 conference for the first time. There are two active Facebook pages, the main Student Council page and the South African Association of Botanists postgrad resource community page. The latter is a very important resource for under- and postgraduate students to receive information on funding or opportunities from across the world. We thank Dr Greve and all who share posts to the Facebook pages for making this a success.

Conferences

One of my main objectives was to secure host institutions for the next three years. We were in a situation where Nelson Mandela University, who initially agreed to host the conference in 2020, cancelled their offer to host. The QwaQwa Campus of the University of the Free State kindly agreed to host the conference in 2020 instead of 2021, under the leadership of Dr Sandy-Lynn Steenhuisen. We are immensely grateful that they were willing to take on this challenge. This, however, meant that there were no host institutions lined up beyond 2020. I have subsequently secured Sol Plaatje University for 2021 (under leadership of Dr Helga van der Merwe), University of KwaZulu Natal for 2022 (this will probably be hosted in the Drakensberg under leadership of Prof. Beckett) and a joint venture between the University of Cape Town and SANBI for 2023, under leadership of Prof. Muasya. Several other institutions were approached, including Rhodes University and University of Zululand, both of whom have indicated their inability to host the conference due to infrastructure or other logistical issues. It will be important for council and the incumbent President in 2022 to secure commitments from another three institutions for 2024-2026.

SAABNet

SAABNet has remained an invaluable tool of communication for SAAB members. Ms Geerts undertook a clean-up of the mailing list, following a thorough update of the membership database by herself and her predecessor Ms Anche Louw. Access to SAABNet is one of the benefits of membership and therefore only members that are fully paid up remain on the list. This mailing list will now be maintained and updated annually. We thank Elisabeth and Dr Q Kritzinger for their management of this resource.

South African Journal of Botany

SAAB continues to be grateful to Prof. J van Staden and the Editorial Board of the journal for their outstanding management of the journal. In 2019 we saw an increase in the impact factor of the journal from 1.442 to 1.504, as well as an increase from six to eight issues, two of which may be special issues. We remain grateful to the publisher of the journal Elsevier and the continued good relationship between them and SAAB. The re-negotiation of our contract with Elsevier during 2019 saw an increase in the payment SAAB receives from Elsevier. This places the Association in a good position, especially with potential changes in the leadership of the journal in the future. Annual meetings of the Editorial Board with Dr Alrun Albrecht from Elsevier at the January SAAB conferences retains effective communication and we are grateful to her for making herself available at these times. This ensures effective

management of the journal and we thank her for taking it upon herself to arrange these meetings.

Website

The current and previous Secretary has spent a lot of time updating and maintaining the website. Council in 2018 thought that it may be necessary to employ the services of a professional web designer, but in light of the sterling job done by Elisabeth this is no longer necessary. I urge council members to communicate any updates or changes directly to Elisabeth to ensure that the website remains a good advertisement for SAAB, and also a resource where people can get information on SAAB and its activities.

Membership

A fee increase to R250 for ordinary members and R125 for students was implemented in 2019. The Association currently has 271 members, along with 153 students that are paid up members after the 2019 conference (see Secretary's report for details). Much progress has been made in cleaning up the membership database, and increasing the number of members that pay their fees. We thank Elisabeth for her hard work in this regard.

Awards

We received one nomination for the Gold Medal, two nominations for the Silver Medal and six theses for consideration for the Bronze Medal. We are therefore awarding all the medals this year, including two bronze medals. I am extremely grateful to Dr Paul Hills and his team from Stellenbosch University for adjudicating the six submitted theses. I am also grateful to council for engaging with the nominations for the Gold and Silver Medals and casting their votes. The winners of the medals will be announced at the Gala dinner at the SAAB 2020 conference. In 2019 we awarded the Sara Nigro Award for Women in Plant Sciences for the first time to Dr Alana Rebelo. This is a cash award of R 2000 that can be used for any academic purpose, e.g. attending a conference or purchasing a book. Dr Nigro has requested that the award amount be increased to R 4000 for 2020 and beyond.

Finances

SAAB remains in a strong financial position, with the reserves in two money market accounts growing again during the course of the year (see Treasurer's report for details). The bulk of the financial gains during the year was from Elsevier, the publisher for the South African Journal of Botany. The expenditure of funds was, as in the past, carefully controlled to maintain a good surplus of funds. It has, however, become necessary to revisit our investment strategy in order to ensure maximum gains from the available funds, and also to ensure the safety of these funds. A strategy for this will be presented at the council meeting. An increase in membership fees to R 250 for ordinary members and R 125 for students was implemented in 2019. At the 2020 conference these fees can, for the first time, be paid along with the conference registration. We hope that this will ease payment to members and

also increase the number of members that pay their fees. SAAB awarded three honours bursaries of R 10000 each and one M.Sc. bursary of R 20000 (see Secretary's report for details).

SACNASP

Dr Van der Niet represents the interests of SAAB at SACNASP and *vice versa*. There has not been much activity of interest to SAAB member, other than the fact that our annual SAAB conference continues to be an accredited conference with SACNASP. The majority of member are, however, not members of this organisation.

SABSplat

The South African Basic Sciences Platform was established during 2017 by the Department of Science and Technology in order to enhance basic science disciplines in South Africa. There was no real activity pertinent to SAAB during 2019.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all members of council for their continued support, input and dedication to the Association. I am very grateful to Elisabeth, our Executive Secretary, for her hard work during the year and for her effort to become familiar with and streamline the processes that need to take place during the year. I am also grateful to the previous secretaries, Mr Myke Scott and Ms Anche Louw, for assisting with the handover process and responding to various queries. This has made it much easier for Elisabeth to settle into her new position. I am very grateful to Dr Paul Hills for his advice and support during my first year as President. I would like to thank council and the members of SAAB for their continued support and interest in the Association.

Personal/general

I would like to congratulate Prof. Glynis Goodman-Cron on her election as Vice-President from January 2020. Again I would like to thank Dr Paul Hills for his very long service and dedication to SAAB. I would also like to welcome Dr Sjikr Geerts to council. I am sure that SAAB will benefit from his involvement and support.