

## President's Report 2017

1. New grants to begin in 2018 were awarded to

Sue Murphy, University of Melbourne: **Identifying the horticultural potential of rare and threatened Australian wildflowers.** Sue will select and assess species (9 or 10) from a pool of rare and threatened herbaceous species indigenous to Victoria. She will propagate and grow a sample of 50 seedlings from each species within a conventional container nursery system, and expose species and selected individuals to public scrutiny within display beds, plant sales and ultimately, landscape use. The project will establish protocols for the on-going assessment of rare and threatened species for horticultural applications. This project will raise awareness of the horticultural potential of our rare and threatened flora, which is often overlooked in commercial horticulture. Successful outcomes for the species in this project will provide the impetus to tackle other rare and threatened flora.

A donation of \$10,000 received from the Australian Native Plants Society Canberra in 2016 will be applied at their request to this project.

Alison Shapcott, University of the Sunshine Coast: **Assessing the diversity and conservation of central Queensland rainforest using DNA barcoding.** Barcoding of plants involves looking at a small stretch of DNA whose sequence is unique for each species. This is a speedy and cheap process, once the DNA barcodes have been established. In addition species can be identified from small leaf samples, which is particularly valuable for rainforest trees. Alison has already developed DNA barcodes for the unique species in the temperate and subtropical southern Queensland rainforests (Shapcott et al 2015), and Costion et al (2016) have developed DNA barcodes for the North Queensland (wet tropic) rainforests. This project will complete the barcodes for Queensland rainforests. They will be used to help identify the areas of high biodiversity and distinctiveness in these and in related Australian rainforests, and to identify priority areas for conservation.

Peri Tobias, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney: **Development of molecular markers for resistance to myrtle rust to identify resistance genes against myrtle rust.** Myrtle rust was first found in Australia in 2010, and has since spread to Victoria and Queensland and has potential to spread to all states and territories. This disease is about as bad as it can get for biosecurity in Australia – a new disease attacking our dominant plants, including eucalypts, paperbarks and about 100 other species, including species important as garden plants, cut flowers, native food plants and species already on threatened lists.

During her PhD, Peri was able to identify certain genes that are associated with natural resilience in *Syzygium luehmannii*. The aim of this project is to see if these genes provide molecular markers that signify resistant phenotypes in other Myrtaceae. If so, they may provide a genetic screening test to enable the selection and protection of endemic Myrtaceae flora.

2. New website: Thanks to our website manager, Jennifer Firn, the Australian Flora Foundation website has recently been renewed. It is still located at <http://aff.org.au/>. Jennifer would appreciate your comments to [Jennifer.firn@qut.edu.au](mailto:Jennifer.firn@qut.edu.au).

3. Retirement of Professor Richard Williams: Richard was the last foundation member of the Foundation: he was not only a member, but also a Councillor at the Inaugural meeting at the University of Sydney on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1981. This year is his 36<sup>th</sup> as a Councillor. In May 1982 the Scientific Research Committee was formed, and Richard was a member, as he is still. In 1994 he took up the post of Vice President of the Foundation, and in 1998 became President, combining it with being a senior academic at the University of Queensland. Richard finally stood down as President in 2005. During his Presidency the size of grants was increased from between \$2,000 and \$4,000 to a

more effective \$10,000 to \$20,000, a reflection of the stronger financial position the Foundation achieved. He also strongly encouraged the development of a website for the Foundation, which was finally launched in 2004. He was a farsighted and kindly President. During his subsequent time as Vice-President he continued to actively contribute to the work of the Foundation. We wish Richard a long, healthy and happy retirement.

The second Councillor to retire this year was Caroline Gillard. She joined in December 2015, and in her brief period made the valuable contribution of updating the Foundation membership brochure, which is passed out at meetings of associations whose members may be interested in joining us.

4. Thanks: A special note of thanks to the members of the Finance Subcommittee: Ian Cox, Charles Morris and Ross Smyth-Kirk for their work on reducing the annual deficit on our General Fund, primarily caused by the high costs of auditing and accounting. Firstly Ian Cox has found a more affordable auditor. Secondly they have recommended we charge grant applicants an administration fee. This is being implemented in 2018, and thirdly members were invited to make a modest contribution to the administrative costs, as well as continuing to support the research funded by the Foundation, and have responded very positively to this.

Finally I should like to thank each you for your contributions over the year, whether as ordinary members, members of the executive, members of the Scientific Committee, and/or members of Council. A special thank you to all donors and benefactors of the Foundation: without you the Australian Flora Foundation could not continue. Particularly noteworthy is the donation of \$10,000 from the ANPS Canberra Group, mentioned earlier, two donations of \$1,000 from the APS Newcastle Group, a donation of \$467 from SGAP Mackay, and substantial donations from a number of other individuals.

*Peter Goodwin*

President

20<sup>th</sup> November 2017