# 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

# The New Zealand Guild of Agricultural Journalists & Communicators

PRESIDENT’S REPORT

The 2022-23 year has been busy for the Guild, one of consolidation but also reflection.

It began with our awards and professional development day in Wellington on 23 September.

The PD session was once again kindly hosted by MPI and attended by 14 people. These provide an invaluable insight into topical issues and – as we found at last year’s September event – are also a vehicle for our roles to be challenged which we should – and did – welcome. Such is the benefit of these days, I urge more people to attend.

The speakers in September were: Jason Wilson, Deputy Director-General, Te Uru Rakau; Dr Mike Joy, Senior Research Fellow, School of Government who gave an ecologist’s perspective on the interplay between freshwater science, policy and real-world freshwater outcomes; Dr Mary van Andel, Chief Veterinary Officer - FMD & animal welfare and Lisa Murray, Head of Weather Communication, MetService - Communicating our Wild Weather.

That evening we again hosted our annual awards which I believe were incredibly successful, attracting record entries and categories won by new entrants. The prestigious Rongo Award went to Kate Evans for two stories on fisheries which appeared in Australian Geographic. Every year I attend these awards, I marvel at the efforts and the values of those who enter, the quality of the entries and their knowledge of our industry. The 2022 event was no different and the level of interest shows the high degree of respect in which they are held. The night was also noticeable for the incredible efficiency of Anne-Marie Case-Mains who performed the MC role brilliantly, completing the formal activities well ahead of schedule.

During the year, I instigated a review of the Guild, concerned that financially we are trading at a loss and surviving off our reserves. I convened a committee of myself, Hayley, Jackie, and Jan to address the problems of declining membership, falling income and reliance on reserves to maintain our activities. We concluded that financially we have time to consider our future and do not make dramatic challenges. Our financial losses have been stemmed and while membership income halved from 2019 to 2023 (of which Covid was a factor), this provides an opportunity to encourage people to join which will resolve some of our challenges.

Another idea to boost our coffers is to host or co-host a major event such as the World Congress. Proceeds from our previous hosting are funding many of our current activities. I have no doubt the Guild will in the future look at this again but in the meantime, I implore all of you to promote the Guild and recruit new members. I thank Hayley, Jackie and Jan and those who contributed to the review.

Due to Covid disruptions, we ended up hosting two Agricultural Communicator of the Year awards at Fieldays in conjunction with our partner, Ravensdown. At the December event, Farmers Weekly Editor Bryan Gibson was named the event’s 36th recipient, and this year the winner was passionate Southland dairy farmer and social media superstar Tangaroa Walker. The quality of nominees was once again exceptional, reinforcing the status of this event.

Following the June Fieldays event, several members asked the Guild to approach organisers to request better quality media facilities which were variously described as noisy, dark, and cold.

Unfortunately, we were not as successful as we had hoped, organisers noting that media requirements for facilities were high on the first day but dwindled on subsequent days. They also noted that just 26% of media checked in and received their media passes indicating a shift in our requirements. They promised to take our member’s concerns into account when allocating space at future events.

In March we once again held our on-line PD sessions, this year with a political focus given the impending elections. Guests included: Damien O’Connor, Eugenie Sage and Nicola Grigg, along with author Byron Clark. The sessions each attracted more than 20 people, including many who do not normally attend our events. This allowed us to showcase our relevance and our reach with what is a great promotional tool.

It has been a bit delayed, Kylie Horomia has confirmed she will be attending next February’s Fruit Logistica conference in Berlin, the first time since COVID the Guild has continued to this venture for members.

It has been a busy but hugely satisfying year capped off with all our sponsors renewing their support of our awards. The only change was Federated Farmers opting to support one instead of two awards. Wools of NZ have picked up sponsorship of the photography section.

I wish to thank Jan for looking after the finances and the executive for their support, wisdom, and work during the year. It is a very experienced and geographically diverse executive and the ease with which you have picked up responsibilities has made my role much easier.

The glue of our small organisation is Secretary Sara Passmore. She told me recently that she loves administration. Add to that her tireless approach to the task, and for both of those attributes, we are hugely fortunate and grateful. Thank you Sara for all you do for the Guild.

Lastly, as this is my last year in the role, I want to wish Hayley all the best as our new president.

Neal Wallace

02-11-23