



A short history of the Australian Society of Soil Science

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In 1955 a resolution, “that the Australian Society of Soil Science be inaugurated as from this meeting” was recorded in Melbourne Australia. The following year in Queensland, the first official meeting of the Society took place with a Federal Executive and Presidents from the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australian and Victorian branches forming the Federal Council. In later years the executive expanded with the addition of the Western Australia branch in 1957, the Riverina Branch in 1962 and most recently the Tasmania Branch in 2008. The objects of the Society were 1) the advancement of soil science and studies therein with particular reference to Australia and 2) to provide a link between soil scientists and kindred bodies within Australia and between them and other similar organisations in other countries. Membership was restricted to persons engaged in the scientific study of the soil and has grown steadily from 147 members in 1957 to 875 members in 2012.

The first issue of the Society newsletter, Soils News, was published in January 1957 and continued to be published twice yearly until 1996. A name change to Profile and an increase to quarterly publication occurred in 1997; circulation remained restricted to members. The Publications Committee in 1968 determined the Publication Series would be the medium for occasional technical papers, reviews and reports but not research papers and in 1962 the Australian Journal of Soil Research was established by CSIRO in response to continued representations from the Society.

By 1960 a draft constitution was circulated to, and adopted by members. The first honorary life membership of the Society was awarded to Dr. J A Prescott. Honorary memberships are still awarded for service to the Society and to soil science and are capped at 25. In 1964 the ISSS awarded honorary membership to Dr. Prescott. Now known as IUSS Honorary members other Australians recognised have been EG Hallsworth (1990,) J Quirk (1998) and RE White (2012). In 1989 a motion was narrowly defeated to introduce a Fellows category of membership to the Society. In 2012 members attending the annual general meeting of the Society discussed the introduction of a Fellow category as an Award and members voted to continue discussion on this initiative.

Federal Council initiated a Student Award in 1969 and over ensuing years a range of awards were initiated; JA Prescott Medal of Soil Science (1972), Australian Society of Soil Science Inc Publication Medal (1979), JK Taylor OBE Gold Medal in Soil Science (1984), CG Stephens PhD Award in Soil Science (2003), LJH Teakle Award (2010) along with the Society’s conference presentation awards. Branches were busy during this time and hosted many activities including seminars, field trips and conferences for both members and those interested in soil science. By the early seventies several branches had conducted refresher courses and in 1974 the Society became incorporated.

The Society hosted its first world congress, the 9th International Society of Soil Science Congress, in Adelaide in 1968 with 310 papers printed, 239 papers presented and 720 delegates. In contrast, 42 years later the 19th World Congress of Soil Science returned to Australia, where in Brisbane 1914 delegates from 68 countries were treated to 343 presentations, 1227 research posters, 8 keynote and 65 invited lead speakers. A commemorative stamp was produced for the first Congress and another stamp was created in 2007 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Society.

Originally Society conferences were held every four years however this was reduced to, and still remains, at two year intervals. An inaugural joint conference of the New Zealand Society of Soil Science and the Australian Society of Soil Science Inc. was held in Rotorua in November 1986. This paved the way for the series of joint national conferences between the two societies, the first one of which was held in Melbourne in 1996, and which have been held subsequently every four years. A society logo was introduced for the national soil conference in 1984 and a competition was subsequently held to design a logo for the Society. The

winning design was launched in 1986, replaced in 2006 and the rebranding of the Society continued into 2011 when the business name Soil Science Australia was adopted by the Society as the ‘public name’ of the organisation.

Over the years the Society was approached to support a range of organisations. It was a founding member of the Australian GeoScience Council in 1982. In general the Society has maintained its focus on soil and limited its associations to kindred organisations. Technology has driven many of the recent changes in the Society. In 1996 the first web site was developed, housed on the University of Melbourne domain. The Society newsletter ceased to be printed on paper in 2002 and delivery to members was via email. Subscription notices are no longer issued and online collection of subscriptions due is via the internet. The administration of the Society was moved to a centralized office run by the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science in 1996 and whilst the Federal Council Executive continues to rotate across the branches of Australia the administration found a permanent home for the first time. In 1998 the first Executive Officer was appointed, whose role includes the administration of the Society. In 2010 the Governor of Queensland, Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley AC Governor of Queensland accepted the invitation to become the first Patron of the Society.

A significant decision taken in 1996 to introduce the Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS) accreditation program has seen the program burgeon primarily due to the increasing demand by Government authorities for certified professionals in soil and land management. Accreditation is only available to members with requirements for accreditation listed in the Standards for Professionals in Soil Science. Finally, in recognition of the declining number of soil science graduates the decision was made in 2005 to allow anyone interested in soil science to apply for membership of the Society. This has been a key contributor to the continued growth of the Society along with efforts by the Society to engage the general public via initiatives such as the Australian soils calendar and Soil Science in Australia magazine.