



CHAIR'S REPORT TO AGM 2024

by Jenny Lux (Co-Chair with Charles Hyland)

My report includes items from the Statement of Service Performance in our audited financial statements, as well as some comments on the current financial year so far, since 31 March 2024.

Soil & Health had 1410 paying members and 49 free memberships as of 31 March 2024 (2023:1695 paying members). Of these, 11 were digital subscribers as of 31 March 2024 (2023: 36).

In terms of progress toward our goals, the following points can be noted about the last financial year, during which I took over from Marion Wood as Chair:

- The publication and distribution of the print version of OrganicNZ magazine continued up to the end of the 2023/24 financial year. The aim of the magazine was to publish articles to advance our objects, open up subjects to readers, inform and persuade as to S&H objects such as the importance of healthy soil and food; promoting organics as a solution to climate change; safer alternatives to common herbicides and pesticides; as well as to provide members with a tangible community and action-oriented information.
- Soil & Health is now developing a Digital Strategy to move towards online publication of information in 2024/25. Six issues of OrganicNZ magazine were published in the financial year, with a combined total of 31,130 magazines printed. Of these, approximately 13,500 copies were distributed to retailers via the Are Direct distribution company, 9,658 were sent to Soil & Health members, 1,989 complimentary copies were sent out (e.g. to life members and advertisers), 1,057 were sent directly to small independent retailers and 1,000 copies were sent to the Biodynamics Association as part of our collaboration with them on the March/April 2024 issue. The remaining 3,926 copies were retained for marketing/promotional purposes, held as stock on hand for sales of back issues, or were pulped. Many articles from each issue are also published online, available to print and digital subscribers. Some of these are 'unlocked' to the public once a six-month period has elapsed since the respective issue went on sale.
- A series of webinars was held as part of our GE campaign to connect with and inform our members of the threat and risks of GE. Experts were engaged to host webinars and provide technical information. GE webinars were held on 21st November 2023, with 243 Registrations, 23rd January 2024, with 263 Registrations and 5th March 2024 with 276 registrations. The webinars were free to attend (although donations were encouraged). The webinar recordings were subsequently made available online. Ministers of government were invited to attend.



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- Soil & Health was a key player in Organic Week 2024. Although Organic Week was held 1-7 May, most of the organisation and collaboration occurred in the six months prior to May. Soil & Health's Co-Chair chaired the Organic Week Steering Committee, the members of which were from Organics Aotearoa and volunteers. Marion Wood of Commonsense Organics, and our past Chair, organised the judging panel for all the judged awards. The purpose of the Steering Committee was to organise sponsorship and events held during the week. Soil and Health and OANZ coordinated the national OrganicNZ Awards held on Friday 3rd May 2024; expanded award categories to include new demographics; as well as advertising of Organic Week to the public. Organic Week was a huge success, with high website engagement, online and in-person events around the country, and engagement from the organic sector in the OrganicNZ Award night. Our sponsorship raised prior to Organic Week covered all costs, and we had over 1000 registrations across 4 engaging Zoom workshops and nationwide participation via 60+ regional events and movie screenings. Social media reach was over five times higher than for Organic Week 2023, largely driven by public and partner engagement with the campaign. Huge thanks to Lou Vicente for her top notch work as a contractor and volunteer for Organic Week.
- Engagement with ministries and government departments by Soil and Health: Soil & Health submitted on the draft National Organic Standard (NOS) (submitted to MPI on 25 May 2023). Soil & Health holds a seat on the Ministry for Primary Industries Organic Sector Advisory Council (OSAC) which is currently advising government on the drafting of the NOS and other organic regulations coming from the passing of the Organic Productions and Production Act 2023. Quarterly OSAC meetings were attended by Jenny Lux, and other regular online meetings, emails and phone calls were kept up with both MPI and the OANZ Standards Technical Working Group, in which organic sector experts are convened. Some of the extraordinary meetings with MPI involved providing specific technical advice on sections of the proposed standard and regulations, which have yet to be released publicly.
- We have been developing and exploring partnerships, collaborations or associations with other organisations e.g. Te Waka Kai Ora, Organics Aotearoa New Zealand (OANZ), the Biodynamic Association of New Zealand. During last financial year our partnership with Te Waka Kai Ora involved including the Te Waka Kai Ora Chair's Award for Organic Week 2024. Several of us also attended the April 2024 hui in Tamaki Makaurau Auckland in which Te Waka Kai Ora was a prominent organiser. Our partnership with OANZ included vital collaboration over Organic Week, as well as our contribution the Standards Technical Working Group. Our partnership with the Biodynamic Association involved the continued use of biodynamic calendar information in our OrganicNZ magazines, co-publishing OrganicNZ and Harvests back-to-back in March/April 2024 (our last print issue) and helping to promote their 100 years celebration during our Organic Week promotions.



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- We maintained two directorships on the BioGro board and contributed actively to the governance of the company, including participation in the in-person strategy day on 13 December 2023. The current two Soil & Health members on BioGro's board are Charles Hyland and David McNeill (I recently stepped down).
- Ongoing GE Campaign: We commissioned three in-depth articles for OrganicNZ, which are all publicly available, and ran the aforementioned webinars, as well as staying involved in two campaign groups across various organisations, both chaired by Brendan Hoare. Soil & Health media release 12.6.23: Organic regenerative farming needed to reduce climate change, not GE. Soil & Health media release 06.09.2024 Soil & Health Association stands firm against redefinition of gene technology in food standards. We also submitted to Food Safety Australia New Zealand opposing proposal P1055 'Definitions for gene technology and new breeding techniques'. We gave good arguments as to why new breeding techniques (NBTs) such as gene editing ARE genetic engineering, why the definition of what a GMO is must stay process-based, and the terrible impacts that such a move will have on New Zealand's consumers, economy and society as a whole. We successfully engaged many of our members to echo us in their own submissions – thank you to everyone who submitted and gave us copies of your submission.

Governance over the last year and a half has been interesting, to say the least. You will be able to read in my October 2023 and May 2024 reports from our last AGM and SGM to see that it has been a time of huge changeover in national council volunteers, staff and contractors. For the entire time we have not had an Association Manager, and the various teams in National Council have been attempting to manage, during what has been a very tough time financially for the country, for our organic sector, and for Soil & Health. I would like to refer everyone to this very good article on the Spinoff which has comments from media organisations trying to survive during this time:

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/media/12-04-2024/stuff-the-spinoff-newsroom-sysca-and-nz-geographic-on-the-media-crisis>

NZ Geographic magazine's publisher James Frankham said this: "The biggest issue is that I can't see a future for what we do. (...) Traditionally, the magazine stool has three legs – retail, advertising and subscriptions. Only the latter works online, and it doesn't work very well."

Also, this recent time on National Council has also been a time of personal and health challenges for some, which meant that the team had to change quite often. We had generous sums of money donated, but also sums pledged that did not eventuate. Relying on those pledged sums and a potential future turn-around of the magazine situation was probably too hopeful in this economic climate, but we were urged to do so by members, in particular at the last AGM. We finally pulled the plug on the magazine in April, cut our costs dramatically (which included changing our website and membership database, subletting our office until we can



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give up the lease, and reducing contractor hours). We have been working on the digital strategy indicated as the way forward at our May SGM. I will present a summary of that to you now, with the proviso that much of this work was carried out by volunteers other than myself, in particular David McNeill, Terry Woods, Claire Flynn and Peter Davis.

<DIGITAL STRATEGY PRESENTATION>

I was personally quite stressed and burned out by May 2024, when the successful Organic Week concluded, and the last digital issue of OrganicNZ magazine came out, so I have been gradually stepping down and trying to pass on duties since then. My thanks must go to Charles Hyland who stepped up as Co-Chair, and to David McNeill who has become our Treasurer. Also thanks to Leane Makey who joined our National Council as an appointee.

Special mentions: I would really like to thank Pete Davis, a member who has given many hours through his company Fuzion NZ to transition our websites and databases to a new format. I personally do not really understand it all, and it's still a work in progress, but what I do understand is that Pete has donated over 100 hours and counting. Also, special mention at this AGM needs to go to life member and former editor Philippa Jamieson, without whom we would not have a continuing digital newsletter, The Good Dirt. She has been working for free, and doing an amazing job. Philippa also negotiated an agreement with Biodynamics NZ for the continued use of moon calendar data in our own mood calendar which is produced by skilled gardener Monique Macfarlane.

Finally, myself: I will be stepping down from governance, but I am still a signatory of Soil & Health for the time-being, and will continue to represent the Association at MPI's Organic Sector Advisory Council, and within the OANZ Standards Technical Working Group. I plan to assist the incoming National Council and to keep up as much involvement as I can in campaigning. Aroha nui to everyone who has supported Soil & Health to continue.