
President's column

This is my last column as Co-President of the Association, a role I've shared with (now President) Dr Heide Friedrich for the last year. It's been a continuing learning experience for me personally, and it's been energising working with Council members and a crew of people passionate about making the most of science for the nation.

Many of the issues that the Association has explored over the last decade remain at the forefront of nurturing our science ecosystem. Career development and the postdoctoral squeeze remains a challenge. I do get the sense though, that now at least this issue is recognised by all sides as being real, and that solutions are needed so that our science ecosystem can flourish. The reality that science does not operate in a vacuum is the same as it ever was. Diversity and equity remain a challenge. While great strides are being made in terms of gender and cultural equity, it is clear that there is so much more to do. I accept that I come from a position of privilege on this, and I'm grateful for the guidance from colleagues. The tension apparently implicit in maintaining a balance between science and fiscal responsibility in research and academic institutes continues, and we are promoting the need for more senior scientists to seek board appointments to aid in maintaining this balance. Open access to science and scientific opinion remains a challenge, both in New Zealand and internationally.

On this last point – relating to the ability for scientists to be able to speak out – we've made a mistake. The challenge of providing the best possible evidence to membership and readers stays with us and can raise some complex situations. Last year we highlighted the need for discourse on science in the media to focus on the science and not people. This was especially in connection with media at the time relating to the health of our freshwater systems and the impacts some farming practices were having and a public dialogue between Dr Doug Edmeades and Dr Mike Joy (then of Massey University, now at Victoria University of Wellington). We did this through a letter to the Association's membership¹. In the aftermath of this I suggested to Dr Edmeades that, if he felt his ideas were being misrepresented he should write an article on the science and get it peer-reviewed. While the position of President of the Association doesn't have any particular influence on the journal, I suggested the *New Zealand Science Review* would be one place that he could submit the work. Dr Edmeades did write an article and, while it was reviewed, it was published as correspondence².

The Association's Council has considered the contents of the letter and does not find a basis for its claims and wishes to make it clear that it does not reflect the views of the Association. Dr Joy responds in this issue³ and the Editor is drawing a line under the issue.

This is leading us to reconsider aspects of the Association's journal, the *New Zealand Science Review*, as there are changing models for such tools and a growing diversity of places where opinions can be aired, given that there is an expectation that we all respect ethical constraints such as those outlined in the Royal Society Te Apārangi Code of Conduct⁴. What will continue is that the journal, largely through the valiant efforts of its editorial team, will be a place to publish peer-reviewed articles on NZ-focused science and science policy, science education, science planning, and freedom of information. It provides a unique source of information to the community, building on its legacy over the past seven decades, now and in the future.

As this column was being written, the Minister for Science and Innovation, the Hon. Megan Woods, announced the continued funding of the National Science Challenges. It is very encouraging to hear that support for mission-led science is continuing. However, the report on the first phase of the funding is not being released. We are left with the likely situation that we will be given very little information to evaluate the success of one of the largest experiments in New Zealand science funding undertaken in recent times. This is untenable, but perhaps not surprising as it reflects a national attitude towards opacity in funding decisions. The reason most often given is that disclosing reviews will propagate litigation from disgruntled scientists. Maybe, but this points the finger at scientists. What about The Process and the reviews? I think we need to make the decisions guiding our science funding far more transparent – and this extends beyond the National Science Challenges.

One initiative I intend to stay involved with is fostering a version of 'Science Meets Parliament' that suits the New Zealand science ecosystem. This concept, developed in Australia over the last two decades, seeks to come up with new pathways between scientists and politicians and decision-makers. It has also just been taken up in Canada with a recent event in Ottawa. To be clear, the idea is not about facilitating lobbying, but about building links and enhancing awareness of each other's perspectives. I took great pleasure in presenting the early plans at the recent 2018 NZAS annual conference in Auckland. The Association is in discussion with the Royal Society Te Apārangi, the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Universities New Zealand, Science New Zealand, and the Research and Education Advanced Network New Zealand (REANNZ) in order to seek funds to proceed with a pilot event.

I'd like to thank Associate Professor Nicola Gaston for having invited me to take on the role of President, and for the Council in supporting me, which was a leap of faith at the time. In turn, Dr Heide Friedrich has embraced the role and is bringing a unique flavour as she has set about refreshing the team and processes. Thanks everyone.

Craig Stevens
Co-President

¹ Subsequently published as NZSR (2017), vol. 74(2): 46 – Correspondence.

² NZSR (2017), vol. 74(2): 47–49 – Correspondence.

³ Correspondence – this issue, page 21.

⁴ Royal Society Te Apārangi Code of Professional Standards and Ethics – <https://royalsociety.org.nz/who-we-are/our-rules-and-codes/consultation-on-new-code-of-professional-standards-and-ethics/>