
News

The Prime Minister's new chief science advisor

Professor Juliet Gerrard FRSNZ, the Associate Dean (Research) at the School of Biological Sciences and School of Chemical Sciences, Auckland University, has been named as the Prime Minister's new chief science advisor. She replaces Sir Peter Gluckman, the first government-appointed chief advisor, who served in the role for almost a decade.

Professor Gerrard trained at Oxford University, before moving to New Zealand 21 years ago to work as a scientist at Crop and Food Research. She then worked at Canterbury University in the late 1990s as a lecturer and a director before moving north to Auckland University in 2014.

Professor Gerrard said she was absolutely thrilled about her new role. She wanted to put particular emphasis on using social media to make science more accessible: 'Working alongside all of the quite dry, academic reports to do another release to the public to explain not just the conclusion, but also the essence of the debate that got us there,' she said.

Professor Gerrard's work spans biochemistry, biomaterials design, and health science. Her current research focuses on how the structure and assembly of a protein influences its function, an area which has potential applications in the development of new drugs, materials and foods.

As well as being the second chief science advisor, she is the first woman to be appointed to this position. 'The times are changing ... I hope my appointment will go some way towards encouraging ambition in young female scientists', she said. 'For a long time women were quietly advised to choose between a science career and children, and that's no longer true.'

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said, 'Professor Gerrard has had a distinguished career, specialising in a range of disciplines. She was also the past Chair, Royal Society Te Apārangi Marsden Council, giving her wide exposure to all science disciplines. Her new role not only provides me, as Prime Minister, with high-quality scientific advice to support good robust decisionmaking, but plays a vital role in promoting science and technology, explaining its contribution to society and the economy, and promoting the sector to young people as a career opportunity.'

'Given the low number of women in science, and the need to encourage the next generation to enter into this field of study, it is especially pleasing to be able to appoint our first woman as the Prime Minister's chief science advisor,' Jacinda Ardern said.

Ms Ardern also acknowledged and thanked Sir Peter for his commitment and ongoing contribution to New Zealand science matters in this role over the past decade.

On 28 July, Professor Gerrard talked to RNZ's *Nine to Noon* presenter Kathryn Ryan, about her approach to the role: <https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetonoon/audio/2018651757/pm-s-new-science-advisor>

