
President's column

The Association has reached in its 75th year! Consider the changes in human society, both within New Zealand and globally in that time, the changes to our environment and ecosystems, the global conflicts, the adventure into space and more besides. It has been a period like no other in history – and science has been a big part of this. Looking forward, continued change seems to be the only foreseeable constant.

This is at the heart of our 75th Anniversary Conference, being held at Te Papa right around the time of publication of this issue of *New Zealand Science Review*. With planning led by Nicola Gaston and myself, the conference runs with a dual theme of looking at what the Association has achieved to date, and then turning to face the future. Speakers will address topics ranging from the history of the Association and New Zealand science, through to challenges facing various sectors of the community now and in the future. The conference wraps with a discussion about how we can do our best for the next generation of scientists. This relies on us, the system, providing a supportive environment for the next generation of leading scientists to grow and evolve in. The challenges facing early-career researchers in all facets, be they funding, diversity, or career path, are ours to share. This strikes at the core purpose of the Association: to be about the role of 'The Scientist' in the past, present and future.

While we've been planning the conference there's been a disturbing example across the Tasman of the battle being faced by 'for the public' science everywhere. Around the start of the year, CSIRO, Australia's government science agency, announced it would effectively stop climate prediction science. Arguing that the case was closed and now it was time to get on with working out how to respond, CSIRO announced wholesale culling of internationally high-profile scientists and science. The perversity of this Australian move so soon after the Paris Climate Agreement is well-documented elsewhere¹. From the climate perspective, this shift has substantial implications for New Zealand, as Australian climate science not only is a key player globally, but even more so in the Southern Hemisphere. The incredulous condemnation has been swift and global in scale. We wait to see if this outcry has any impact on the decision.

It is worth considering how the Australian shock-treatment throws some light on the New Zealand 'for the public' science system. In dynamics there is such a thing as 'impulse response', whereby you improve your understanding of a system by giving it a sharp perturbation. This some-

times shows up behaviour where analysis of the response to gradually varying forcing is not so clear. It is worth noting that, when scaled by population or science proportional investment, recent events in the New Zealand science scene (recent staff losses at AgResearch, Landcare and Callaghan Innovation) would be greater than the CSIRO losses presently creating international condemnation.

It seems that this was an Easter Egg (not the chocolate kind; for those of you without access to someone under 25, look it up!) left by the recently departed Abbott government looking to drive *all* science with entrepreneurial values. One of the key claims made as the cuts were announced was that the initiative was numbers-neutral – there would be the same number of employees after as before. This in itself is a clear reflection of not understanding how science works. Scientists are HR pieces to be chopped and changed, started and stopped? It simply doesn't work like this. Generating, evaluating and propagating new knowledge takes time and continued investment. One thing is certain, there is nothing about predicted climate, population and ecosystem metrics that indicates enhanced ignorance is the way forward.

So what to do about it? Come to the conference, talk to people on the NZAS Council, drop me an email (president@scientists.org.nz), and use the Association membership as a gathering of colleagues. I know it is hard to think beyond that next manuscript, report, class, field-trip, proposal(s), etc., but try and use the Association. It is also worth mentioning that we have announced our annual Awards, to be held at the Royal Society of New Zealand in Wellington in early September. Put on your thinking caps and nominate yourself or a colleague who you think is bringing, or has brought, something to New Zealand science.

And use the *New Zealand Science Review*. It provides a unique outlet for refereed analysis and discussion of science and science policy issues. Better still, consider submitting an article. This issue looks at research into introduced species in New Zealand, as well as some book reviews showing that writing about science in New Zealand is very healthy indeed. As ever, I acknowledge the continued work of everyone on the Council, and all the members who helped out with other roles. I look forward to a constructive and energising 75th year for the Association.

Craig Stevens
President

¹ <http://www.nature.com/news/job-cuts-in-australia-target-climate-scientists-1.19313>