
In this issue

In this issue of *Science Review* the Association's new president Dr Craig Stevens introduces himself. Craig, a physical oceanographer is a principal scientist at the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) and holds a joint position at the University of Auckland.

In his inaugural President's column, Craig notes the annual celebration of the Association's medal winners for 2015 (see p.83) held at the Royal Society's premises on 19 November. Craig comments on the upcoming MBIE funding round and indicates that the Association's 75th anniversary, which falls in 2016, is a milestone well worth celebrating. He thanks outgoing president Dr Nicola Gaston, whose efforts over the last 2 years have greatly enhanced the role of the Association as the 'conscience of science'.

Nicola's Annual Report for 2014/15, presented at the Association's AGM in October, flags the Association's continued involvement during the upcoming year with the development of a Code of Public Engagement by the Royal Society of New Zealand. NZAS has been invited to give feedback on the style and content of the initial guidelines which have been drafted by the RSNZ. Nicola remains on Council as immediate past president.

In their article *The policy worker and the professor: Understanding how New Zealand policy workers utilise academic research*, Victoria University's Karl Löfgren and Donatella Cavagnoli examine how New Zealand policy workers use academic research and advice. The authors note that while such studies have been undertaken in other Westminster jurisdictions they are rare in New Zealand.

From their findings they offer the following propositions. Firstly that New Zealand policy workers differ from, for instance, their North American counterparts in their use of evidence in task analysis and are better described as 'policy craftsmen' who balance available (and often incomplete) policy evidence with short time frames, limited resources and political demands.

Second, the majority have access to electronic databases and library catalogues, and they do access and use peer-reviewed scientific material. Third, in terms of the usefulness of specific disciplines and methods, the traditional policy-relevant disciplines and methods are the most preferred.

Finally, although there are signs of an active use of academic output within the policy community, there are equally signs confirming the picture of two distinct communities, with respondents touching upon the problems of the timeliness, policy relevance and reader accessibility as constraining factors for using academic work.

Our peripatetic editorial committee convenor and palaeontologist, Hamish Campbell, gives us an insightful account of the 2015 VESPA voyage of discovery exploring a submarine

sector of northeast Zealandia which took place on board the French research vessel R/V *L'Atalante*.

VESPA is an acronym for 'Volcanic Evolution of South Pacific Arcs', a research project conceived and led by co-chiefs Martin Patriat (IFREMER = Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer, Brest, France) and Nick Mortimer (GNS Science, Dunedin, New Zealand). The principal objective of the VESPA 7700 km and 25 day voyage was to sample volcanic rock formations exposed on the deep sea floor in water depths of 1000–5000 m to gain knowledge on the undersea ridges in the areas traversed and the polarity of subduction in these areas.

Hamish notes that such voyages exemplify one way in which the New Zealand earth science community, and GNS Science in particular, is able to embrace the challenge of exploring the geology of the greater part of submarine northern Zealandia.

Waikato University's Jacqueline Rowarth's article *Policies for reviewing science programmes* is prompted by a recent statement by the Minister of Science and Innovation that 'Crown research institutes are about commercial science – that's why they're there. The pure science tends to be done more at universities'¹.

Jacqueline notes that achieving excellence in science research is an international goal, with much well-meaning research and policy-setting attempting to achieve this. This is no less so in New Zealand.

However, despite these efforts, the New Zealand science system is not flourishing, with ramifications extending to the negative attitude of school students to science and mathematics when compared to their international counterparts. Jacqueline comments on the policies and evaluation of the science sector over recent years and identifies shortcomings in the economic and financial drivers employed by successive governments. She concludes that, to re-create a vibrant science system, scientists must be put back at the centre of decision making, and those with successful track records must be adequately funded. She believes commercial research definitely has a place, but not at the expense of public good research, and the best outcomes are achieved when top researchers work together, whether at a CRI or a university.

Finally in this issue we carry reviews of the following recently published books: James Hector: Explorer, Scientist, Leader, by Simon Nathan; The Knowledge Wars, by Peter Doherty; and Living on Shaky Ground: The science and story behind New Zealand's earthquakes, by Matthew Wright. Enjoy.

Allen Petrey
Editor

¹ <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/business/crown-research-institutes-are-about-commercial-science-steven-joyce-q12558?autoplay=4510637313001>

ERRATUM

The NZ Association of Scientists would like to correct a factual error contained in the press release sent out on 22 September and published in *NZ Science Review* 72(2), p. 60. We have been advised that the figure of 53% of AgResearch staff having worked there for less than two years was based on an incorrect transcript of the evidence given to the Education and Science Select Committee earlier this year. We would request that this error not be propagated further in future reporting on this issue, such as when final decisions by AgResearch are made on science staff reductions.