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## President's report 2014/15\*

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to serve as President of the New Zealand Association of Scientists for the last two years. It has also been an interesting time for the science sector as a whole, with the release and revision of the National Statement of Science Investment<sup>1</sup> over the last 18 months.

It hasn't been the only issue to come up, however. Several of our Crown research institutes have been through rounds of redundancies and restructuring, causing renewed concern about the stability and attractiveness of scientific careers in New Zealand, despite this having been a key motivation for the introduction of core funding for CRIs in the first place. This concern was compounded by comments from the Minister, Steven Joyce, who came close to redefining the purpose of CRIs when he stated that '*Crown research institutes are about commercial science – that's why they're there*'. This misconceived oversimplification has echoes in the final National Statement of Science Investment, which represents the CRIs as sitting between 'idea development' and 'idea leverage' in the scientific landscape, and risks excluding them completely from the business of generating new ideas. This is a dangerous vision which risks undermining the provision of leading edge scientific expertise in New Zealand, in my opinion.

A related issue, if we are to talk about scientific capability in New Zealand, is the continued lack of funding for postdoctoral fellows in New Zealand. The word 'postdoc' was mentioned several times in the draft strategy, and more than 50 times in sector submissions, but occurs nowhere in the final document. This is an embarrassment.

If the National Statement of Science Investment is to provide any kind of strategy for the funding of science in New Zealand, it needs to grapple with the issues that are too hard for any individual institution to fix. Near the top of that list should be issues of career stability, of equity and diversity in the science sector, an awareness of how funding drives individual behaviour, and an understanding of the changing nature of the scientific workforce, both in terms of demographics and of disciplinarity. Funding of scientific infrastructure is also an obvious omission from the matters that the National Statement of Science Investment has concerned itself with.

### Issues for the next year

An issue which will come back to visit us in the next year, is the development of a Code of Public Engagement by the Royal Society of New Zealand. We have been invited to give feedback on the style and content of the initial guidelines which have been drafted by the RSNZ, and we will certainly do our best to represent the diverse concerns that have been expressed to us about the messages that will be conveyed – both directly and indirectly – by that document.

### Conference

One reason for optimism about the Code of Public Engagement is the success of our conference, held in April this year, and the very open and collegial way in which concerns about the ability

of scientists to go public were both raised and considered. I'd like to express my thanks once again to all the contributors and participants, but particularly to the organising committee: Natalie Plank, Shaun Hendy, and Allen Petrey.

### Membership

Growing our membership is an important challenge for the Association, and one I am sorry to pass onto the incoming President. I am, however, encouraged by the enthusiasm that two of our new members of Council, the incoming Membership Secretary and Treasurer, Troy Baisden and Chris Bumby, have shown for the task. I am pleased to know that this job is in such highly capable hands.

### Awards and medals

Our annual awards will be announced on 19 November, at a function held at the Royal Society of New Zealand in Thorndon. I'd like to thank Peter Buchanan once more for doing an excellent job in overseeing the process, and all our judges for the service they provide.

All members are invited to attend and celebrate with us at the ceremony.

### Council Membership

I would like to thank and acknowledge the following members of Council who have served during 2015:

Neil Curtis, our Patron.  
Shaun Hendy, Immediate Past President, and Chair of the Communications Subcommittee.  
Hamish Campbell, Chair of the New Zealand Science Review Subcommittee.  
Paul Gandar, Treasurer and Membership Secretary.  
Fiona McDonald, Executive Secretary.  
John Clare, Minutes Secretary.  
Allen Petrey, Editor of the *New Zealand Science Review*.  
Justin Hodgkiss, web manager.  
Peter Buchanan, Chair of the Awards Subcommittee.  
Desmond Darby  
Mike Berridge  
Chris Bumby  
Joanne O'Callaghan  
Natalie Plank, who chaired our conference 'Going Public'.  
Rhian Salmon  
Troy Baisden  
Noam Greenberg  
Simon Lamb  
Craig Stevens, who has joined us during the year as a new member of Council.

Thank you all for your advice, support, and hard work over the year.

**Nicola Gaston**  
President  
14 October 2015

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\* Presented at the New Zealand Association of Scientists' 74<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 14 October 2015 at the Thistle Inn, Thorndon, Wellington.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/science-innovation/national-statement-science-investment>