
President's column

Interesting times

These continue to be interesting times for science, and scientists, in New Zealand.

Crown Research Institute mergers have been floated, then deferred, but are probably on the agenda for 2012, pending the outcome of the general election in November. Meanwhile, Industrial Research Limited (IRL) remains under scrutiny, and may yet be relocated or redesigned.

The tragic February earthquake in Christchurch has naturally drawn resources away from other areas, leaving the economic outlook subdued for the year ahead, and budgets tight.

The new Ministry of Science and Innovation is now well under way and poised to begin administering core funding to CRIs. Those affected are awaiting the new funding world with anticipation and just a little uncertainty.

The 2011 budget has unsurprisingly offered little for the science sector – some funding reshuffled into earthquake-related work, and some targeted on business R&D, but a small cut to overall public funding for science. While these changes are reasonable in the short term, we must not lose sight of the need to fund the long-term 'R' so that we have ongoing ideas and results to apply the 'D' to. Science in New Zealand remains seriously under-funded both publicly and privately, and until that changes we are likely to lag behind our OECD comparator nations in economic terms.

The NZAS Council is keeping a close eye on developments – there will doubtless be plenty to think about as

the election approaches. We are planning a conference for late in 2011, following the success of the October 2010 meeting. The theme is likely to be around issues for emerging scientists in New Zealand. NZAS is involved in a joint conference on science policy, early in 2012. The preliminary notice for this conference, *Policy for Science and Science for Policy* appears on the last page of this issue.

Once the last wrinkles in the membership processing system are ironed out, the new NZAS web site (www.scientists.org.nz) will be fully operational. We plan to link in to sciblogs.co.nz (run by the Science Media Centre), to encourage member interaction on science issues. The web site will also be useful as we go through the 2011 election campaign. The Association has begun canvassing political parties for their science policy statements and vision. We will mount the various political parties' science policies on the NZAS web site over the coming weeks, and we'll encourage interactive comment and feedback from members. This should make for some interesting reading, for scientists and politicians alike.

I wish the New Zealand science community well for the coming months, especially colleagues in Christchurch, still dealing with the earthquake aftermath months down the track.

James Renwick
President, NZAS