

1994 NZAS Survey of Scientist's Perceptions of New Zealand Science: On the Role of the New Zealand Association of Scientists

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The last question in the survey asked that respondents to prioritise the three most important of ten aims of the Association. Obviously clearer instructions were needed: some respondents ranked three aims, some marked three unranked, some ranked or marked more than three. We finally didn't differentiate priorities within an answer and counted each response as equal, ie with a high priority compared to the unmarked aims. The total for each aim was expressed as a percentage of the total responses, listed in rank order of the NZAS responses.

think was a lesser priority and (ii) that non-members felt that science promotion and encouragement of excellence was of greater priority. These may reflect a real difference. We feel that ongoing systematic analysis and discussion of the science environment, including science policy, is an essential part of modifying that environment. Hence, the Survey.

Every Aim was regarded by at least some respondents to be of greatest importance. The Association tries to give attention from time to time to all our aims, including two not

l i s t e d : c o m b a t i n g pseudoscience, and fostering international links. The focus is on promoting the doing of excellent science rather than on dissemination of scientific knowledge *per se*, although these objectives overlap considerably. The emphasis of NZAS activities has changed as times have changed, and will continue to do so. The activities of other groups affects what the Association does, as duplication is a waste of our scarce time and resources. An example is in combating pseudoscience where the Sceptics Society is active. However we, for example, have objected to Aorangi Polytechnic's proposal to establish a degree course in naturopathy, designated as applied science to add insult to injury. Attacks on science by pseudo- and anti-scientists are increasingly ac-

cepted (sometimes in the highest quarters) and represent an alarming threat to New Zealand science and society. This area may yet need to become a future focus for the Association.

Currently, our major concern is to analyse and influence New Zealand science in order for it to produce the quality science New Zealand needs, and to make science and scientific research a reasonable career option for creative innovative people. After the 30% cutback in government science, the destruction of many scientist's careers and the changes in science organisation which have occurred, we wish to see that New Zealand develops a strong and vibrant science sector.

Table: Aims for the NZAS

Aim	NZAS members % Response	NZAS non-member % Response
Influence government policy	15.8	14.2
Increase public awareness of science	15.0	14.2
Debate science policy	13.4	10.8
To promote science	13.0	15.0
Improve conditions of scientists	11.0	11.5
Encourage excellence	7.5	10.3
Promote free exchange of knowledge	7.1	7.6
Promote social responsibility	7.1	6.1
Defend freedom of expression	5.9	5.5
Eliminate ethic and gender barriers	4.2	4.7
(n responses)	(575)	(2212)

Overall, there is a striking agreement between NZAS members, and non-members, as to where the Association should place its current priorities. Respondents felt that the main emphasis of NZAS was on the top cluster of five aims. These involve analysing and influencing the environment of science in New Zealand.

Because the perception of members, and non-members, of the role of the Association is similar, presumably we should have a much larger membership! The only notable differences between members and non-members were: (i) on debating science policy, which non-members seemed to