

Science Meets Parliament 2011

Science meets Parliament 2011 was an eventful experience of meeting many scientists at Parliament House and discussing their science. I was able to attend through the sponsorship of the CSIRO Staff Association and the CPSU.

We spent the day before at Old Parliament House, where we learnt about politicians and the media. Two issues emerged for me out of these discussions. The first was the different time scales that science, the media and politicians operate under. It may take a scientist many years to answer a scientific question where as journalists or politicians expect answers within hours. The second issue that arose were the barriers in place between scientists and the media. Many organisations have policies that prevent employees commenting to the media and must instead direct the media to their Communications Section. This slows down the response to the journalist and often means they will seek an answer from someone else, for the immediate response they need. The comments will then come from someone who is not necessarily the expert in the field.

I did get the opportunity at Science Meets Parliament to meet with my local MP, Andrew Leigh. Three scientists including myself discussed our sciences, which all had an environmental theme. We all made use of our training the day before on how to present what we do in an engaging and concise way. The key is to show how science provides benefits to the community rather than why.

The importance of science was further highlighted through both the Meet the Minister session with Senator Kim Carr and the National Press Club Address by the Chief Scientist, Ian Chubb. Both discussed the importance of basic research and promoted the Respect the Science campaign.

I would like to thank those who supported me to attend Science meets Parliament and encourage others to attend in future years as it is a valuable experience.