

Science Meets Parliament 2011

Overall, I found the whole experience quite interesting. Whilst having an active political interest, I knew little of how parliament house “worked” and the disturbingly busy lives of our politicians.

The first day started off a talk from John Flannery who educated us on the local focus of the current parliament, and that in order to get our relative fields of science recognised, we’d need to adapt the importance of our science to the grass-roots level. This was followed by an afternoon led by Niall Byrne of Science in Public, where we learned tools and skills to ensure we could simplify the important findings in our research so the general public could understand and appreciate. I found this session very rewarding, as it was quite challenging to get the main messages of my research across in a 6-10 second “grab”. We were also briefed with the do’s and don’ts when meeting with politicians the next day, such as avoiding asking for funding, and providing a concise wrap-up of our work and why it’s important. The evening followed with a formal dinner at Parliament House, where we were to mingle further with other scientists, as well as the politicians seated at our table. Unfortunately those seated at my table were otherwise engaged, which was a little disappointing. It would have been nice to talk to some politicians in a more relaxed environment.

The second day was quite hectic, and due to the unfortunate clashes with my scheduled meetings with two MPs, I was unable to attend the speech by Ian Chubb at the National Press Club, question time in Parliament, or Senator Christine Milne’s speech at cocktail hour. I did however have the liberty of meeting with Dr Dennis Jenson (MP for Tangney) and Ms Sophie Mirrabella (MP for Indi). Each meeting was held in their rooms apart of parliament house, and was attended by three or four scientists from other fields. The discussion with Dr Jenson proved quite lively; Dr Jenson is a climate change ‘sceptic’ (I must state he is not a complete denier, as he does accept some of the science, just not all of it), and we were talking with him for 1 and ½ hours! Unfortunately I don’t think I was able to change his mind, however it certainly gave me skills in focusing on the main points of my science, particularly when conversing with those that don’t necessarily believe it. Our meeting with Ms Mirrabella was much shorter, and she seemed genuinely interested in the importance of science, particularly in educating the wider public and at the school level.

All in all, my experience at Science Meets Parliament 2011 was both educational and enjoyable. I gained a greater appreciation into the workings of Australian Politics, and the importance of tailoring scientific research such that it is relevant to today’s society. I sincerely thank the CPSU staff association for sponsoring my attendance.

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