



CSIRO STAFF
ASSOCIATION

Wavelength

A newsletter for members of the CSIRO Staff Association

The CSIRO Staff Association is a section of the Community Public Sector Union

August 2010

Wavelength special edition: Science policy and the Federal election

Science needs good policy

Australia has many proud scientific achievements, including some very significant achievements that have been generated by government science - via the CSIRO - over a number of decades.

In 1956, CSIRO's Dr Alan Walsh invented the atomic absorption spectrometer. Currently CSIRO is leading the world in developing faster internet and wireless communications.

Because of its staff, CSIRO is a trusted name by many Australians. However, today only 12% of Australian science is undertaken in government agencies.

With the upcoming Federal Election focusing attention on policy, this edition of Wavelength is focused on issues important for CSIRO's workforce.

This includes a statement on science policy from each of the political parties and a look at science workforce policy issues.



CSIRO has been conducting research in Australia and around the world since 1926.

Societies aren't made of sticks and stones, but of men whose individual characters, by turning the scale one way or another, determine the direction of the whole. (Plato, Republic)

We should be similarly wary of accepting common opinions, we should judge them by the ways of reason not by the popular vote. (Michel de Montaigne)



Culture wars at CSIRO

ABC Radio National Background Briefing takes a look at CSIRO: Sunday 18 August 2010

When scientists - who believe passionately in independence, in pure research, and in sharing information - are asked to conform to business plans and commercial-in-confidence clauses, there are bound to be tensions.

The CSIRO is going through massive culture change: less pure science, more social science, and industry can wag the tail.

Sunday 9am
repeated Tuesdays 7pm

CSIRO Staff Association President Dr Michael Borgas has participated in this program.

Fact or Fiction

In 2011, CSIRO plans to shut another 11 libraries, leaving just eight hubs.



From reds under the beds to climate change: What is the future of government science?



Election comment: Dr Michael Borgas, President, CSIRO Staff Association

In July, the CSIRO Staff Association wrote to the major political parties asking for their views on science advice in government. We detail their responses in this edition of Wavelength.

Science in government agencies now represents 12% of Australian science activity, and much of this is directed at science advice to government and society. Thirty years ago 45% of Australian science was in government agencies.

The Staff Association believes that more science advice is currently needed, and this needs to be acted on by our decision makers. Our policy endorses the Charter as an important part of protecting our rights and responsibilities as scientists giving advice, and on expectations and respect for decision makers in our society.

The ALP has endorsed the Charter, it has established the permanent office of the Chief Scientist, and there are many ad hoc science advisors throughout the bureaucracy, but overall it is happy with business-as-usual. However, the new ALP Science policy includes new initiatives improving science-for-citizens as well as committing to new quadrennial funding for CSIRO. Also, even with the Charter, our public actions as scientists have not been without controversy and angst.

The coalition offered the expansion of CSIRO in the 1950s and 60s as evidence of support, but it is not widely appreciated that this was a reactionary period driven by a suppression of comment in Australian science and attacks from right-wing politicians on communist influence in CSIRO.

In a re-run of history, similar attacks have been made recently in Senate Estimates hearings, although a promise is now made to treat science with upmost respect. A Charter is one important way to deflect such attacks, but it has not been committed to by the coalition. In related Liberal party R&D policy releases, public money is promised towards private sector innovation and agriculture.

The Greens have responded through Senator Christine Milne, who recently said in response to the ALP policy that 'One wonders what's the point of media training programs for scientists and researchers unless they can speak their minds'. The Greens are calling for a 'fresh start' with new procedures and protocols because of lack of openness for over 15 years. Their policy is to consult with current and former staff and they advocate independent research in the public interest.

A recent survey by the University of Queensland Institute for Social Science Research was cited on ABC Lateline 11 August: '98 per cent of Greens say they're greatly influenced by scientists compared to 85 per cent of Labor politicians, 54 per cent for non-aligned politicians and dropping to 44 per cent for Liberal-National politicians.'

Science policy is never a key election issue, but many of the elements of sustainability go far beyond how and how much science we do.

Science is never about business-as-usual, and the risk-adverse business-as-usual attitude of many politicians around the world is in fact the biggest risk of all.

The process of science-in-government is clearly a work in progress.

Wavelength

Wavelength is a monthly newsletter for members of the CSIRO Staff Association focusing on industrial and professional issues relevant to Australian scientists and science support staff.

We welcome contributions from members.

Please send submissions to Margaret Puls, Editor – Margaret.Puls@cpsu.org.au or the CSIRO Staff Association - csstaff@cpsu.org.au

Wavelength is authorised by Sam Popovski, Secretary, CSIRO Staff Association.

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What the political parties say about science

In July the CSIRO Staff Association wrote to the political parties to ask them to specify their policies for science.

Below are links to the responses we receive, which are all available on our website.

Read our letter and visit our 2010 election science and CSIRO web information page.

<http://www.cpsu-csiro.org.au/eng/showpage.php3?id=2580>

Greens

"CSIRO is nothing like the research organisation that it used to be. It has been cowed by successive federal governments, with the Howard government being an absolute champion at turning the organisation into one too afraid to say anything about climate change."

Read the Greens response the CSIRO Staff Association about science policy: <http://www.cpsu-csiro.org.au/pics/Greensresponse.pdf>

Australian Labor Party

The Gillard Labor Government's supports science and research: "we want to foster collaboration, unlock the potential of existing resources, lift quality, link to the global research effort, improve access to knowledge, and engage with the public, industry and the world".

Read the ALP response -

<http://www.cpsu-csiro.org.au/pics/ALPresponse.pdf>

ALP Science for Australia's future policy document:

<http://www.alp.org.au/agenda/more---policies/science-for-australia-s-future/>

Speech by Senator the Hon Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research at the launch of the Atlas of Living Australia, Melbourne, 28 July 2010

<http://www.cpsu-csiro.org.au/pics/KimCarrspeech.pdf>

Coalition

In Government the Coalition will always seek scientific advice from public and private research bodies when appropriate. We will always treat provision of scientific advice with care, and the scientific community itself with the utmost respect.

Read the Coalition response <http://www.cpsu-csiro.org.au/pics/Brian-Loughnane.pdf>

The Coalition has always been a strong supporter of CSIRO, and we are determined to continue that record by ensuring that resourcing of the organisation is structured in such a way as to give it the best possible opportunity to fulfil its mission of delivering research solutions and results with high relevance and impact for Australia.

Sophie Mirabella, Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. <http://www.cpsu-csiro.org.au/pics/response2fromcoalition.pdf>

What others are saying about Australian Science

By Michael Borgas, President, CSIRO Staff Association

The **Academy of Science** is disappointed that no parties are committing to expenditure targets of 3% of GDP for Australian R&D. Australian governments spend about 0.7% GDP, and business about 1.3%. To match other OECD countries the task is to structure our business for more R&D, which requires linked up industry policy as well as science policy. More at the Academy website:

<http://www.science.org.au/reports/election-statement.html>

The **FASTS** website also has material on the election and is worth a look: They highlight the promotion of public communication of science through initiatives like 'Inspiring Australia'.

http://www.fast.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1

Both FASTS and the Academy are suggesting implementing new positions of **Science Advisers** in all government departments (modelled on the UK), but the Staff Association is looking for more innovative approaches linked to the Moran review of the public service: Ahead of the Game.

http://www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/aga_reform/aga_reform_blueprint/index.cfm#blueprint

Models like the Presidential Council of Advisors of Science and Technology, PCAST, in the US are particularly interesting: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp/pcast>.

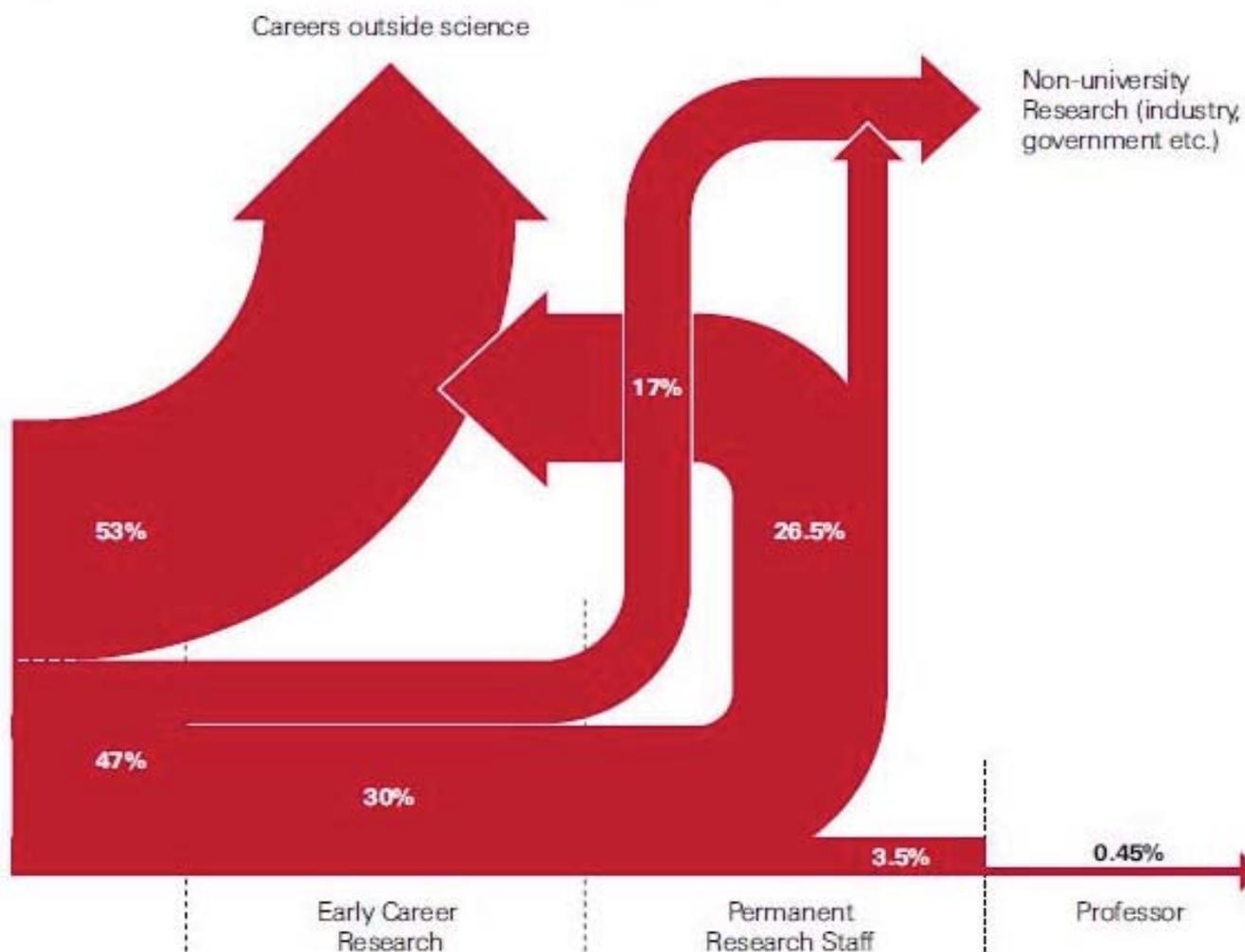
On the other hand we have Ray Evans writing in **Quadrant**: "Such a scapegoat is ready at hand: the CSIRO, which has become so deeply corrupted by its thirty-year participation in this scam that its demise will be a welcome reminder that the wages of corruption are institutional disaster and disgrace" but you can't please everyone!

<https://www.quadrant.org.au/magazine/issue/2010/7-8/laputans-in-retreat>

Some of my previous pieces on science policy are at:

<http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/opinion/by/michael-borgas>

Careers in and outside science



The diagram illustrates the transition points in typical academic scientific careers following a PhD and shows the flow of scientifically-trained people into other sectors. Source: *The Scientific Century: securing our future prosperity*. <http://royalsociety.org/the-scientific-century/>

People flows in and out of science

A PhD can be a gateway to a scientific career. But the majority of people undertaking a PhD will end up in careers outside scientific research.

The journey from PhD student to professor is punctuated by key transition points. At each of these points, some scientists leave scientific careers, and only a tiny proportion of PhD students will end up as university professors. Policy can help ensure job security and flexibility, so that the best scientists can reasonably expect long, rewarding careers. Despite progress in the past decade, ensuring a diverse scientific workforce remains a challenge. Women are still under-represented in the latter stages of scientific careers, particularly in the physical sciences.

Meeting Australia's research workforce needs

The Australian Government has outlined its intention to develop a research workforce strategy in *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21st Century*. In that statement, the government highlighted the vital importance of the research workforce for Australia's innovation system.

The Government has identified ensuring that there are sufficient HDR qualified individuals to meet workforce demands; maintaining the quality and international standing of Australian research degrees in the face of the expanding skill requirements and global competition; and providing supportive career structures and pathways for researchers throughout their careers as the key research workforce challenges to meet rapidly changing needs and priorities. As part of the process for planning to meet these challenges, Senator the Hon Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, has released a consultation paper on meeting Australia's research workforce needs – to focus discussion and generate ideas. The CSIRO Staff Association has provided a submission to this consultation process.

Read the Staff Association's submission <http://www.cpsu-csiro.org.au/pics/RWS.pdf>