



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

May 2010

Last orders for Catherine

After 18 years, no redundancy payout because she's over 65

After 18 years at CSIRO's food science laboratory in Brisbane's Cannon Hill, Catherine McKie – CSIRO's last canteen supervisor – has been made redundant.

The Cannon Hill site is closing on 18 May and the remaining staff will be relocated to the Queensland Government's Coopers Plains health facility – an 800-strong government site.

Catherine started at Cannon Hill on a six-week placement. She and husband Robert had recently settled in Brisbane after living in New Guinea. They lived in New Guinea before and after the country's independence. And so it was then when Catherine first started her employment with CSIRO, she had in fact retired.

Running the busy canteen at Cannon Hill took her out of retirement. She enjoyed her work so much, she stayed for the next 18 years, surviving several attempts at redundancy, enjoying strong support from the staff at her site.

Catherine worked long hours when the canteen was its busiest.

"I used to come in early and cook breakfast for staff and the companies who were on site," she recalls.

Staff were spoiled over the years by Catherine's homemade lasagna, curries, quiches, muffins and scones.

"We had about 120 staff back then," Catherine says.

"We used to have a great social club – I did the catering for all the Melbourne Cup lunches and staff Christmas parties."

Finally, on the day of the 2009 Christmas Party, Catherine, along with other Cannon Hill staff, was told she had been made redundant.

Because Catherine is over 65, she loses the automatic right to a redundancy payout – a condition Catherine wants to speak out about, to warn other CSIRO staff who may be approaching this age.

"The CSIRO Executive fought hard to be able to make staff redundant at 65 and staff lost this



Ms Catherine McKie with Queensland and Northern Australia Staff Association organiser Dr Tom Dixon at the Cannon Hill site, which closes this month.

condition in the last bargaining process," says Catherine.

"I think it is discriminatory to be penalised because of your age. Everyone should get involved in the next bargaining process to make sure you have your say."

In addition to losing an entitlement based on her age, Catherine has been given contradictory advice on her payout, which has upset her.

"I just think they could have made more effort," she said.

The CSIRO Staff Association wishes Catherine the very best on her second attempt at retirement.

FOOTNOTE: The CSIRO Staff Association is seeking feedback from members on their experience with redundancy processes in CSIRO. Email us at csstaff@cpsu.org.au

Did you know?

Some 500 senior managers and staff from other areas in CSIRO are on Clause 11 contracts, although the numbers are dropping.



Notes from the 64th Consultative Council

By Sam Popovski, Secretary

INDEPENDENT SURVEY:

Craig Roy stated it was not his intention to stifle participation in the survey and staff were free to fill it out. Craig has also promised to get personally involved to progress an agreed delegates rights protocol in accordance with the bargaining framework.

SIMPLIFICATION PROJECT AND EFFORT LOGGING:

Michael Eyles updated us on the CSIRO simplification project. He concentrated on talking about a new CSIRO document called 'The Way We Work'. However, this document does not really address the issue of simplifying organisational processes and bureaucracy.

CSIRO STRATEGIC PLAN 2011-2015

We had a productive discussion with Jack Steele, who is in charge of the process of developing the new Strategic Plan.

There are some good messages coming out about preparedness, capability and infrastructure. We are looking to develop a position paper/statement with members in June/July.

REGIONAL SITES

We again pushed on regional sites and the national footprint of CSIRO when discussing the strategic plan. Despite a lot of in principle support by the CEO since she started, there was again no commitment given by Jack Steele or Craig Roy about regional sites or incorporating support for specific regional sites into the strategic plan. The national footprint issue will be one of the two major topics at the next Consultative Council meeting.

THE 500 CLUB

Clause 11 contracts declined in total numbers since the last quarter. Perhaps we've reached a plateau of about 500 to take into account senior managers and other Clause 11 areas. What we don't know, and what might be even more revealing, is the average top-up amounts in the contracts. If the Executive Team contracts trend is anything to go by, this amount appears to be increasing.



Have your say about life in the Matrix in an independent, voluntary staff working life

Staff working life survey - have your say

Have you completed the 'Working at CSIRO' survey yet?

This survey is an opportunity for you to provide feedback on your experiences of work at CSIRO, and in doing so contribute to the development a detailed picture of the current work environment at CSIRO.

Feedback has been very positive and we hope to have a high return rate from staff across all CSIRO sites. If you have not yet completed the survey, we encourage you to take the time to do so.

If you require a replacement survey or would like any further information about this research please contact the research team at csiro-survey@unimelb.edu.au. Thanks for your participation.

- the Research Team

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.

Articles should be between 150-700 words in length. Please attach photos separately. The deadline is the 20th of each month. Please send submissions to Margaret Puls, Editor – Margaret.Puls@cpsu.org.au

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

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CSIRO's revenue puzzle

Why is it so?

We said:

The CSIRO Executive Team has not properly explained why the organisation is financially constrained. Staff numbers are not increasing. Is it due to the costs associated with implementing SAP? How much can be attributed to the increases in Senior Executive salaries or high end Clause 11 contracts?



Member Feedback:

"This puzzle needs addressing urgently.

It is a mystery given we (the scientists) are all effectively 100 percent allocated to projects/programs and these are all carefully budgeted. Any overspend or underspend is monitored on a monthly basis and actions taken to address these and my opinion is that underspends are (at least) just as frequent as overspends. We have been successful in chasing external monies and there has been an increase in appropriations over time. Therefore, why is there pressure on the finances?

Possible explanations may be that there is no pressure; this is simply an annual statement by CSIRO. Or the financial reporting and monitoring is faulty due to inadequate finance department and financial tools (i.e. SAP). Poor invoicing may be an issue, or it may be that the original budgeting is faulty (unlikely).

I suspect that any component that has blown out are the expenses that are supposed to be covered by the project overheads - including the operation of the Executive. Some specific areas that need scrutiny:

- Clause 11 contracts - these are anathema to most scientists and should be open to scrutiny
- ET appointments of PA's at certain salary levels without (apparently) following due process re: advertising and selection
- Travel costs. I am suspicious of the benefit to the Organisation of senior managers travelling overseas to attend conferences and giving presentations, when their primary responsibility is to manage the organisation and address a myriad of issues relevant to its day to day operation. This "grandstanding" on the international (and sometimes national) stage) is of little benefit (except to the person's career path). Many presentations should be delivered by competent and available scientists who actually perform the research
- While long-term service in one position may be a thing of the past, the frequency of changes in senior level management positions must be expensive (apart from being inefficient). I suspect this is a feature of careerists moving through and up the structure with decreased commitment to the staff and science below them.

There appear to be a number of large-scale ET projects that have been less than successful and must be/have cost significantly. Some of these include which deserve scrutiny include:

1. SAP (obviously)
2. Planning of proposed move of Aspendale and Highett sites to Clayton - this has been ongoing for many years with little sign of progress
3. The ACCESS climate modelling project. This "top-down", non-science driven program has been underway for over five years. It involves numerous scientists (both CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology) but has, and is unlikely to deliver, any meaningful scientific output within the next few years. It was driven by senior management, some of whom have moved on, but has suffered from numerous difficulties - much to the disappointment of the scientists involved. The costs of this program over the years needs to be scrutinised carefully - given that it also involves an overseas travel component (see points made above). This non-science program will eventually be revealed to have been an enormous mistake.

These are just a few issues that I think are relevant. Good luck with forcing an explanation."

Buried treasure?

Staff still waiting for psychological health and wellbeing outcomes

By Elizabeth Hulm

Reviewing an Australian Government Comcare report recently on psychological injury in the workplace, I was struck by the report's glowing endorsement of CSIRO's management of psychological injury.

I quote from the CSIRO case study printed in the report:

"Comcare research discussion group participants indicated that CSIRO has a culture of support and awareness of mental health, which has resulted in employees feeling comfortable about discussing mental health issues. Participants also reported that CSIRO management's response to psychological injury has developed over time, creating more comfortable, trusting relationships that are conducive to open and honest communication in the workplace." (p25)

The CSIRO case study profiled by the Comcare report seems to borrow heavily from a report that has not been made available to CSIRO staff yet!

I am the CSIRO Staff Association representative on the Psychological Health and Wellbeing Working Group, which produced the Psychological Health and Wellbeing in CSIRO Mitigation Strategies and Improvement Programs report in June 2009.

This report aims to identify psychological health and wellbeing stressors in CSIRO, determine the impact of these stressors, establish if stressors are associated with specific locations and identify mitigation strategies to reduce the negative impact of these stressors.

The Psychological Health and Wellbeing Working Group included a chief, deputy chief, flagship director and executive assistant.

Each committee member understood CSIRO from different perspectives and we were all committed to achieving good outcomes. Therefore, it is disappointing staff are now coming to the conclusion that the report has been "buried".

The following is a timetable of events behind the psychological health and wellbeing initiative, as I understand them:

MAY 2008: First meeting of the committee.

NOVEMBER 2008: The CSIRO Staff Association holds a consultative council meeting Geoff Garrett and the union where Neil McKenzie (chair of the committee) presented a Power-Point presentation outlining the progress of the committee. This presentation was later presented to Divisional Chiefs.

APRIL 2009: Psychological health and wellbeing committee finalises the first draft report.

MAY 2009: The chair of the committee and three committee members meet with Craig Roy and Joanne Daly to discuss the draft and invite comment/suggestions.

JUNE 2009: Final draft including changes from feedback prepared.

JULY 2009: The final draft report is delivered to Craig Roy on 17 July.

AUGUST 2009: The Committee is advised Craig Roy has not yet had time to look at the report.

SEPTEMBER 2009: The CSIRO Staff Association at Consultative Council raises concerns about the delay in the progress of the 'Psychological Health and Wellbeing in CSIRO' report implementation with the CEO Megan Clarke and Craig Roy. At the meeting we are told responsibility for the psychological wellbeing initiative will be taken out of HSE and put into HR. We were also advised that implementation of the report's recommendations would be in the hands of the Simplification Project managed by Michael Eyles. The Executive would report back to the union on progress (which they have so far failed to do).

OCTOBER 2009: Ian Treloar, Staff Association organiser and rep on the HSE committee called a national hook-up of HSE reps to go over the report recommendations. The CSIRO Staff Association Secretary released a bulletin on the recommendations from the report and this was subsequently done through the Wavelength magazine and sent to members.

MAY 2010: Still waiting!

MORE INFORMATION:

- No link to the report - it hasn't been released to staff!
- Comcare's BEYOND WORKING WELL: A BETTER PRACTICE GUIDE report: http://www.comcare.gov.au/forms_and_publications/publications/safety_and_prevention/beyond_working_well_a_better_practice_guide

UPDATE

At the Consultative Council meeting earlier this week, the CSIRO Staff Association was advised that Craig Roy will meet with the Staff Association to review progress in implementing the recommendations. Craig will also provide us with ET's final response to each of the recommendations, including the allocations recommendation that they had previously rejected. A working group coordinated by James Moody, which includes a Staff Association representative, will develop a new allocations process.

Megan tags our poster!

One of our posters in the tea room at Narribi caught the eye (and pen) of CSIRO CEO Dr Megan Clark during a recent visit by ET. In response to the headline 'Is Effort Logging worth the effort?' Dr Clark wrote on the poster: "Not really, we're working on it."

Effort Logging Is it worth the effort?

Not really, we're working on it Megan

Letting you get on with the job

Over the last few months the CSIRO Staff Association has received constant feedback from members about the frustrations they feel when they are forced to comply with time consuming

Supporting members in IM&T

By Jeff Carig, NSW Organiser

In March, I met with IM&T members in Sydney to discuss issues of concern.

Feedback from members included:

Erosion of conditions:

Members highlighted that over the past few years due to the steady centralisation of IM&T, staff were required to travel to sites more frequently. At first, travel allowance for these trips was recognised, but over time they have been fading away.

Also, some term staff are not given ample notice of the continuance of their contract which leads to uncertainty impacting on morale not to mention stress due to uncertain future income.

Ad-hoc decision-making:

Management have been changing jobs and structures in IM&T with little or no consultation. This is destructive to morale as staff are unclear of their duties and/or responsibilities due to the frequency of change.

There are reports that certain staff have been on Enhanced Remuneration Allowance for periods in extension of 12 months. These allowances should be reviewed to stabilise IM&T structures.

Recruitment trends:

The appointment of too many senior staff from external organisations does not reflect well on the CSIRO and IM&T as an organisation that develops and invests in existing staff by promoting internally.

Culture of fear:

The current culture in IM&T means some staff are reluctant to 'speak up' about poor management decisions and processes for a fear of redundancy, demotion or further re-structure.

What you can do?

The meeting with IM&T members was a beginning and a good chance to generally discuss issues but we need further discussion amongst staff and feedback through your Delegate or Organiser.

To effect change within IM&T we need to work as a group.

The CSIRO Staff Association would like to hear from IM&T staff in other States who can offer feedback on these and other issues of concern. Please contact: csstaff@cpsu.org.au

