



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

November 2010

The cat clowderer

By Michael Borgas, President, CSIRO Staff Association

Clowder - a group of cats (noun)

Former CEO Dr Geoff Garrett is author of a new book, the unfortunately titled 'Herding Cats'.

The book's publicity preamble states: "It is well known that in their professional lives most academics and researchers will – like cats – seek to exercise as much independence as possible."



Dr Geoff Garrett

The title of the book inevitably suggests the image of the bureaucrats urge to control all things.

In fact it is with some irony that the book (jointly with Sir Graeme Davies) note that:

the biggest thing that I have found out through the years is that many people in research are actually bureaucrats.

They recognise an inherent need for bureaucracy (to herd), but they nevertheless list the Chamber's dictionary definition:

...any system of administration in which matters are hindered by excessive adherence to minor rules and procedures...

and point to some of the negative impacts on morale of staff. But I could not agree with the notions around 'red tape' as largely just the repetitive task of excessive reporting or book-keeping.

The real problem with bureaucracy, or red tape, is the control and politics of decision-making, not just providing the information that goes into the process. It is the difference between information and power and the problem arises when the information does not effectively influence the power.

It seems that this problem is age old and in this edition we cite an old Chief of my Division, Dr Bill Priestley, and his reflections on his and Sir David Rivett's shared philosophy.

Our members are also unhappy with too much

top-down bureaucracy and we perceive this to be a problem in CSIRO. This does not mean rejection of all administration and bureaucracy, but rather that it must be in the service of the best science for the beneficial social goals and not the other way around.

Service from science in the here-and-now is best achieved in an institutional structure like a government department or executive agency and is classically bureaucratic. A science institution must instead innovate and create things that bureaucrats cannot envision.

Whatever models emerge in CSIRO's next strategic plan, the ability for science at a project or program level to influence strategic decisions must improve.

The Staff Association is engaging with the open science, open government initiatives which impact on the bureaucratic nature and control of our activities. We are sponsoring a forum on November 24 at Clayton inclusive of all CPSU Science agencies, including science institutions like CSIRO, regulatory agencies, executive agencies, standards bodies and policy groups.



The daydreams of cat herders

Fact or Fiction

Is the number of MBAs in CSIRO increasing more than PhDs?



Bargaining updates

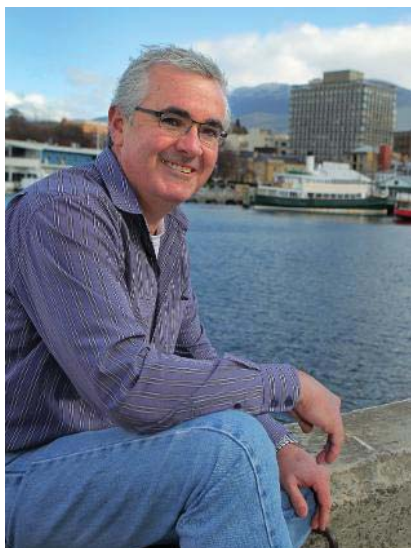
Now that bargaining has commenced, we update our new bargaining campaign website with the latest news each day after bargaining.

From the homepage you can view at a glance the latest updates for November.

The blog software also allows you to comment on each update and provide feedback to our bargaining team and other members. We welcome your comments.

www.csirobargaining2011.org

Andrew Wilkie visit



The Staff Association recently invited the Hon Andrew Wilkie, Independent MP for Denison to visit staff at CSIRO's Hobart Laboratories. The visit was jointly hosted by CSIRO. Sam Popovski, Secretary of the CSIRO Staff Association, said he and other staff had been impressed by Mr Wilkie's interest in the science undertaken by staff in Tasmania.



Where do astronauts hang out?

Chiefly speaking



From the archives, we bring you the wisdom of Chiefs

“The principle that administration in science be designed to help the scientist was given position of primacy by Rivett by CSIR. It has been sad to observe its decline together with the enormously increased share of the cake now gobbled up in non-productive activities. I can claim to be one who resisted to the last. But the Chiefs, by number and nature, were never fitted to form a united front on any issue. Just before he had retired, Rivett had written to a colleague: ‘Like you, I am unhappy about the future. The main danger, as I see it, is that people will knuckle under to the bureaucratic regime and, by avoiding fight and seeking comfort, they will gradually reach a condition of tolerant acquiescence in what they formerly knew to be wrong. A generation will arise that knows not freedom and will be content to do without it. Then some day, an old battle will be fought over again.’”



Dr Bill Priestley (1915-1998), Chief of Meteorological Physics Division, CSIRO, 1946-1973



Secure your working future

csirobargaining2011.org

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

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Save Regional Science campaign

Report from Consultative Council 4th November 2010

The Staff Association presented a detailed paper developed by our Regional Science network. The network is a national group comprising delegates and active members from regional sites.

The paper titled "CSIRO Regional Footprint: a steady decline" highlighted the following:

- The large number of past regional site closures and the recent decline of staffing numbers at many regional sites
- The reduction in support staff and services and the impact upon science output and quality
- The problems associated with having single division sites, at times limiting multidisciplinary research and staff mobility
- The lack of clear management authority/accountability for regional sites (this has resulted in situations where some staff are contacting Megan Clark directly, as the only way to seek to get a decision made).
- A lack of a coherent funding approach to regional science, for example in Northern Australia
- The untapped potential of regional sites to undertake targeted interdisciplinary research with local communities and industry
- Access to childcare, training and development and travel allowance

The CEO acknowledged that the management authority/accountability for regional sites was not clear, particularly in supporting 'champions' for each regional site. A number of potential solutions were discussed, including providing more resources through Divisions and elevating the role of the OIC.

The CEO also stated that there was nothing planned in terms of proposed site closures. The Staff Association noted that while that may be true, staff are sceptical given what was happened to regional facilities in the past, including at Merbein and Rockhampton. Whilst staff welcomed the CEO's support for regional sites when she visited them in 2009, the reality is that a lot of sites have gone backwards since then. They want the CEO's support to translate to more secure jobs and better research.

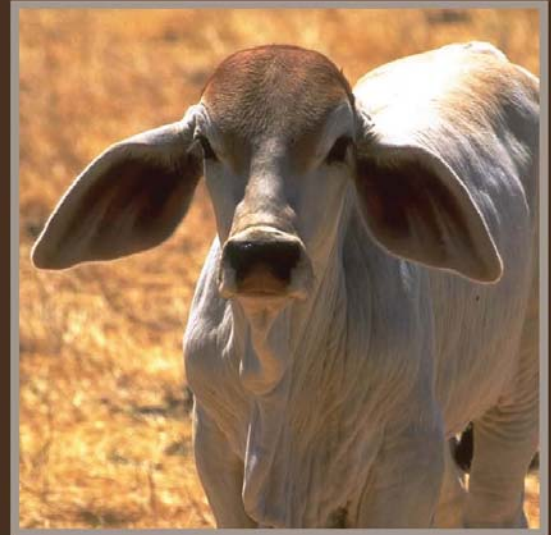
Effort logging – progress at a snail's pace...

Also at Consultative Council, the Staff Association pursued the failure to implement effort logging changes as agreed with us in July 2009. The changes would mean that the vast majority of staff would be on planned hours effort logging, thereby removing the individual requirement to log hours.

The Staff Association was advised that the delays in implementing these changes were due to the matter being 'deprioritised' relative to other changes to systems that have arisen following the introduction of SAP. This 'deprioritisation' was not discussed with the Staff Association and seems the wrong decision given the increased time and scientific productivity that we believe will result from the change.

At the Consultative Council meeting, a new proposed implementation date of March 2011 was promised. The CEO requested that the Staff Association be provided with monthly updates on progress until then. We will keep members updated.

SMARTER AGRICULTURE



Growing competition for land, water, and energy will affect our ability to produce food, as will the urgent requirement to reduce the impact of the food system on the environment.

- Food Security: The Challenge of Feeding 9 Billion People

Let's find the right balance between critical research mass based in cities and 'place-based research' in regional landscapes among community and industry stakeholders.

National challenges have regional characteristics. We need regional sites to properly conduct scientific investigations of our landscape and industries.

Join our campaign to Save Regional Science.

csirobargaining2011.org



Staff feel insulted

Staff in regional labs feel insulted by the comments by Mike Whelan. If they (Executive) took the time to listen to our concerns they would find scientists are very happy to book their own travel, search the library online and reconcile credit cards (obviously the biggest burdens placed on the Executive). I don't recall anyone ever complaining about these tasks. These are not the support services that result in time demands when taken away. The loss of one support position in a city lab means more work for a few others to maintain the service. The loss of one support position in a regional lab means complete loss of service that must be performed by scientists and remaining staff. When scientists and technical staff spend their time simply running and maintaining the lab, research is jeopardised.

Effort logging 101, but why?

The easiest way to make your effort logging hours fit your allocations is to automatically distribute them. I remember entering my real hours when this first started, but don't now, just enter the 0.74 hours per day for projects requiring 10% of my time, etc. As long as the work gets done, what does it matter? Nothing is done to query extra time spent at work, and if you effort log it, it screws up project budgets, so of course, you don't do it. The real question is, why does this have to be done to satisfy a bunch of accountants? It's a mystery why a top-notch science organisation buckled under to the Howard government's nit-picking (just about the only way it could find to get at CSIRO, apart from budget cuts) and imposed this on its staff. I'd like someone to show me how this has increased the effectiveness of the work we do.

Why make scientists do more admin?

Since when was it a positive for scientists to do their own administrative duties? How can the organisation claim to be focussing more on 'research' when they cut support staff with the understanding that scientists will be stretched when it come to booking travel/doing mail/ Ordering stationary/Reconciling expenses etc.

Improve management constructively

I encounter poor management all the time. I truly wish I could speak up, but I fear the consequences. I personally would dread being a manager. I doubt I'd do a good job. I suspect the reason many of our managers are poor is they are scientists first and foremost. There is a real need to vastly improve people and project management, but we must begin with a culture where constructive criticism is welcome.

Code of conduct has staff seeing red

Dear Staff Association,

I thought you might like to know we attended the 'roll out' of the new code of conduct talk, and a patronising, condescending experience it was. Ironically, while the Code admirably emphasises collegial conduct – it dictates that we will behave in a certain way and adds a compulsory e-learning course to our list of nonsensical administrative things to do.

I haven't behaved improperly, why do I have to complete an e-learning on my conduct?

I should stress that I am more than happy to be bound by this Code of behaviour, I already behave that way, but I really hope the science executive/corporates' are bound by it as well (though this seems unlikely).

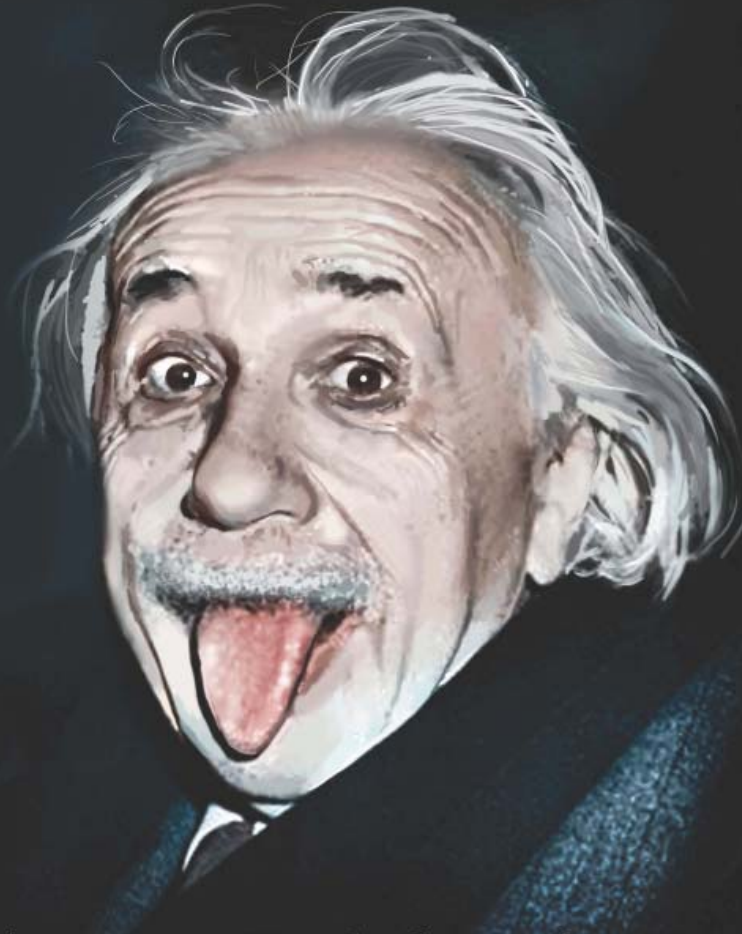
More importantly, a question about the costs of rolling out this new code was given a pretty incomplete answer. Allegedly the 10 page Code was produced by the Strategic HR manager (50% of her time for 6 months) and three full time staff (presumably working 100% for a similar period of time). There was a mention that 100 (presumably executives/corporates') had input to the document. That itself is pretty scary to me: It took 4 people, 6 months to write 10 pages. I think I'm in the wrong job. I mean let's be clear – I'm sure we aren't the first organisation to have a document like this one.

Add to this, the printing cost of the code (\$10,000) the cost of making the e-learning module (\$????) and the cost of 6000 staff (sitting thru a 60-90 min presentation), followed by the same 6000 staff having to do the e-learning (30 mins or so) and you're talking about a very large amount of money, a back of the envelope calculation suggests well over \$2 million?

With \$2 million of funding we could do some serious research.

I happily accept that a good code of conduct is a great thing, but I suspect this is more about satisfying a check box on some corporate APAs rather than instituting any real cultural change. I'd also argue that it's probably a massive waste of resources, it could have been done in a much less costly fashion, in an organisation where scientists are desperate for money to undertake real projects in science.

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“I consider it important, indeed urgently necessary, for intellectual workers to get together, both to protect their own economic status and, also, generally speaking, to secure their influence in the political field.”

- Albert Einstein, on why he joined the faculty Union at Princeton as a charter member.



Secure your working future

A better enterprise agreement at CSIRO in 2011
<http://csirobargaining2011.org>

