



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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The importance of science-based approaches for good environmental outcomes

Sir Peter Gluckman, Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister, is urging New Zealanders to adopt science-based approaches in national conversations about resource conservation and environmental protection.

In a speech to delegates at the 2012 Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Seminar, Sir Peter outlined the need for careful, informed evaluation of trade-offs and risks in effecting good environmental outcomes for New Zealand.

“Conservation and environmental sciences are complex, and trade-offs are inevitable as we face a growing population with higher expectations,” says Sir Peter. “We may have to face some very important decisions. What technologies would we see as acceptable to enable nationwide eradication of possums? We need to develop a better understanding of the meaning of risk and risk management in evaluating decisions made about resource extraction and conservation.”

Sir Peter argues that science remains the only process we have to gather reliable information about our world to reduce uncertainty. “A scientifically literate and engaged population is best placed to evaluate technologies and make decisions on trade-offs,” he says. “This is essential to navigate the opportunities and threats associated with environmental challenges, and the rapid changes that technology brings.”

He points towards the NZ-led Global Research Alliance on reducing agricultural greenhouse gases as a model for a science-based approach to increasing agricultural efficiency while sustaining food production and seeking environmental protection.

“If we can improve productivity while consuming resources more efficiently or creating less pollution, there will be undoubtedly some degree of win-win for both the economy and the environment. The challenge is to keep discussions informed by science and not dominated by rhetoric.”

The speech is available [here](#) on our website.

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