



## Remarks by Sir Peter Gluckman (Chair of NSC Panel) at announcement of National Science Challenges

### Auckland War Memorial Museum

1 May 2013

Science has much to contribute to New Zealand's future and across a very broad canvas. Today we can see that Government recognizes that even at this time of relative austerity, it is important that we enhance of investment in science across a broad range of domains. It shows that much has changed and science is now clearly understood to be at the heart of a better future for New Zealand.

I presented the report of the National Science Challenges panel to the Minister a month ago and I am delighted its recommendations have been adopted by Cabinet with minimal change. The Panel comprised some 11 members, 9 senior scientists including the chief scientist from NSW Australia and 2 emerging scientists. The Panel worked intensively over several weeks, first to digest the vast number of both public and academic submissions and then to formulate their ideas in accord with the criteria that the Government had provided.

We were seeking to identify about 10 areas where a more integrated and mission-led approach to science and one which got beyond traditional institutional and disciplinary boundaries, and yet built on our most effective domains of science to make a real difference to our nation's personal, social, environmental and economic health over the next decade.

Having read the submissions from both the scientific community and general public, the Panel explored the opportunities and risks that New Zealand had to face and where good science could provide real *additionality* by Challenge funding. From this discussion we were able to identify an initial list of possible science challenges, partially from our own thinking and partially from the submissions. Many of these were of course overlapping. On reflection some were areas that did not need a challenge approach and could be dealt with through other science funding tools. Others were issues that were primarily those of needing better application of current knowledge rather than an intensive new science effort.

So the group soon came down to about 12-15 challenges depending on whether we were lumping or splitting them in trying to create manageable and logical units. The Panel then entered an iterative process between the submissions, working in small groups and then as a committee as a whole repeatedly to refine the challenges. We then identified the key themes and provided examples of the kind of research that was needed and checked that we could match the challenge to the requested criteria.

By the end of the process we felt that we had identified a balanced portfolio of challenges that would make a real difference to New Zealand and which were within our collective capacity to have real impact, provided institutional issues did not get in the way of a collective scientific effort. Indeed what was clear was the real need to break down competitive and disciplinary silos that have impacted on the productivity of our science system for some decades.

There was one underlying set of issues that kept coming to the surface – namely the issues of STEM education and the nature of the interaction between the scientific community and the wider community. We see these as critical issues that have been disparately and unevenly addressed - if they are more coherently addressed then New Zealand will really be able to take full advantage of a greater investment in science. This is why the Panel proposed a special leadership challenge that we think Government as a whole must take ownership of - I am pleased to see that Government has indeed accepted this challenge.

There are definitely components of the challenges we recommended that would not be there had it not been for the extensive consultative process.

There were other key learnings from the public submissions. One was that there are many areas where known science could be far better applied to our national benefit. Another was the repeated view that New Zealand is not using scientific evidence sufficiently well in policy formation – something I am trying to address elsewhere.

This was a very cohesive process: the Panel was unanimous in its recommendations and enjoyed a total lack of political or official interference in our deliberations.

The work of the challenges now they are identified is just beginning – there is much to do to go from a concept to an integrated mission-led approach and this will require much dialogue between the Ministry and the scientific community. I am pleased that the Minister agrees that the Panel has a critical role in assisting this dialogue moving ahead.

It is also important to note that this is not a total scientific prioritization exercise – certainly it informs components of a more complete science strategy for New Zealand but a full prioritization exercise has many other components. But this was a science-led process – it restores balance between the strong focus we have had for a number of years on shorter-term and largely innovation led research; I am delighted that Government has recognised that we do need to give greater emphasis to longer term science-led horizons.

For a small country with the ambition to be innovative and smart and use its intellectual assets better, this is a very important day – one that will in time benefit our people, our environment, our society and our economy, and strengthen a very important sector of public activity.

Thank you.

ENDS