



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHIEF SCIENCE ADVISOR

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Comments by Sir Peter Gluckman at the Launch of the Science in Society Plan Boulcott School, Lower Hutt

Ministers, Ladies and Gentleman

The release of this plan today is a very important step forward. When the National Science Challenge (NSC) Panel met, it recognised that for New Zealand to make the most out of investing in science for our future – via environmental, societal, health and economic research – the community had to be better engaged.

The NSC panel's task was to identify areas where science, if conducted to international standard and sustained and integrated across New Zealand's previously very competitive institutions, would be likely to have real benefit to New Zealand's future. But as a Panel, we also recognised gaps between the potential of science to advance New Zealand's interests and the capacity of New Zealand to use that science well.

We need more young people to see their future in science, technology and innovation; we need a business sector that understands what science can do for it and vice versa; we need a greater understanding of what science can do for all of us but also what its limits are. We can and must invest better in science but in doing so, we need a society better able to take its products and the knowledge it generates and use it wisely. Indeed if you think of any of the societal challenges ahead of us – from climate change to living in a more connected, more urbanised and more digitised world – we need science and technology to help us navigate our way.

That is why we posed to the Government the need to promote better engagement between science and society, to enhance an understanding of scientific processes and its potential to all sectors of our community. We proposed there were three areas where effort was needed: STEM education; better engagement between the science sector and the public; and a better understanding of the concepts of hazards, risks and tradeoffs.

The Government accepted our challenge, it set officials in action and embarked on a consultative planning exercise and I thank the many people involved.

It is clear government action alone cannot change how we perceive and use (or limit) science. But it can act as a catalyst for positive change – something that will indeed

take time, given the complexity of the issues both for the science community and for society.

This plan is arguably unique among our comparators internationally, in its vision, its willingness to be iterative and self-learning, and in the inclusion of some very innovative approaches. I think it may be the first holistic plan of its nature by any government. In particular, I highlight the initiative for participatory science that I believe will turn out to be a remarkable step forward in integrating all three themes of the project and in really connecting many stakeholders, from pupils to scientists and the broader community.

This plan is but a start but a really exciting one and I thank the Ministers for being so positive and responsive to the ideas of the NSC panel.