



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHIEF SCIENCE ADVISOR

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NSSI offers encouraging vision for science

The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman is optimistic about the new National Statement of Science Investment (NSSI), but says increased funding will be needed to achieve its full potential.

Released today, the NSSI contains important and timely new elements. In particular, the sharper focus on excellence in science is welcome, and the commitment to supporting basic research and research with longer-term horizons are significant steps forward. It is a clear recognition of the important potential of quality upstream science – from growing the knowledge base generally to seeding the pre-competitive space that attracts industry.

The planned reorganisation of MBIE's contestable fund is also a step forward as the funding round will no longer constrain applicants to a tightly defined set of portfolios on a three year cycle. This will enable many more innovative and exciting ideas to come forward, crossing traditional domain boundaries. It is also encouraging to see the reaffirmation of the central role of science in enhancing social, environmental and societal health as well as in economic growth.

Promoting greater private sector engagement in R&D is an important component of the new statement. Ultimately however, to do so also requires culture change, not just increasing direct financial measures aimed at industry. Other jurisdictions have shown that effective change in private sector behaviour requires a high volume of excellent public R&D that is most likely to produce new and disruptive knowledge; a supply of well-trained entrepreneurial graduates in the sciences; and a focus on attracting and retaining leading scientists. The latter play a particular role in attracting R&D intensive multinational activity that is needed to develop a complete innovation ecosystem.

The NSSI sets an ambitious but realistic and appropriate vision for NZ science. It will have optimal effect if it is accompanied by the heralded increases in funding that is appropriately balanced between investments in broadly based public sector R&D and encouraging the private sector.

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