



**Speech notes: Sir Peter Gluckman's opening comments**

**The meeting of the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases**

**Wellington, 7 April 2010**

We face a collective challenge – on one hand, the requirement for food security to support the world's growing population; and on the other hand, the significant contribution that agriculture makes to greenhouse gas emissions. We are here because we think that developing a collective scientific approach both to accelerate the development of knowledge and to ensure its transfer will help to mitigate that considerable fraction of global emissions that arise from a variety of agricultural systems. This Alliance is not about building a complex bureaucratic organisation nor a coalition for advocacy, we are looking to create a focused scientific effort to provide outcomes that will address these issues effectively and urgently.

There are many different types of international scientific partnerships, running the gamut from collaborative but rather unstructured associations generally based on sovereign funding to focused centralised activities such as the International Space Station. Our task is to find a flexible system that empowers our scientists to address the complexities of agricultural emissions in an output-focused way and ensures that knowledge gets transferred to farmers, producers, firms and others in our member countries at very different stages in the economic transition. We need to be flexible about its structure and approach for, if the Alliance is successful, it will evolve over time.

The Alliance has to achieve in several domains:

First, the Alliance needs to create mechanisms to encourage scientists and technologists to share ideas with each other – rapidly and with a level of confidence that overrides the traditional competitive nature of individualistic scientific activity.

Secondly, the Alliance needs to find ways to ensure that, as applicable and practical knowledge is gained and technologies developed, it is diffused to those who can use it – farmers, cooperatives, producers, businesses. Making use of knowledge can be as difficult as producing it, and ensuring diffusion of existing knowledge would be an important first step.

Thirdly, we need to think about ways in which scientists in different jurisdictions can work effectively with each other.

There are many dimensions:

- How to ensure that scientists are confident to exchange strategies and ideas with each other and to share results in advance of the traditional publication processes?
- How to jointly plan research and its support when every nation has its own processes of research funding and prioritisation?
- How to encompass different perspectives, because farming systems vary immensely around the world and what might be practical or seem important to one group may not be to another?
- How to expedite access to research infrastructure, some of which is very expensive?

Fourthly, in time the Alliance may identify the need for “big science” – a collective approach to a problem which is too big for any one jurisdiction. The human genome project was such an example, the large hadron collider is another – will understanding the ruminant gut microbiome be our equivalent? Whatever organisational structure we develop needs to allow for the emergence of such possibilities.

There are many other issues, and these are the subjects of sessions during the meeting and in the subsequent planning.

Within the science there are issues that are relevant to only some or perhaps even to only one of the suggested research groups: intensive and extensive livestock farming, arable and rice. But equally there are some cross-cutting issues such as measuring and modelling emissions, economic modelling, and carbon sequestration. We need the research groups to be launched and quickly identify the scientific priorities. We need to ensure the scientists have the strategic support to do this planning. We must be sure to set up governance structures that empower rather than control our collective scientific communities.

Communicating climate science is not easy – we are, after all, dealing with the most complex and integrated natural system on the planet, one in which change is slow and somewhat uncertain, but which has the potential to affect every component of human existence from our food supply to our physiology and health. One of the biggest issues I face in my role as chief scientist is the loss of public confidence in science, not least because of the activities of climate change sceptics. These controversies have risked undermining the entire scientific process in the public’s mind. We must not allow the Global Alliance to be engulfed by such controversy. It must not become a bureaucratic advocacy organisation, it must be an effective science organisation which is open in what it is trying to do, which must have high standards of scientific conduct, and which should stay focused on science and knowledge transfer.

So what might be realistic outcomes of our discussions?

We should identify the research groupings and establish a process to get them launched, so that key scientific questions are rapidly framed. The research groups need to be focused – there is a danger if they become diffuse. We need the scientists in these groupings to start networking and agree to work together, and develop a mode of operation using the capacity of modern electronic communication.

They need to:

- identify what knowledge needs better diffusion and how that might be achieved
- inventory research already underway and how it could be strengthened, and
- identify where new challenges exist and develop a **research road map**.

And to support this we need to make progress on a number of matters, including the shape of the Charter, the issue of intellectual property – a subject I suspect we will have to have a separate specialist meeting about, and how to address the involvement of non-Alliance members – including the NGOs, the Foundations and the private sector. We need to leave here with a process, an agenda and a timetable to achieve this.

Thank you.