



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
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Scientists and the media must work together to engage the public with the complexities of science

The public has a right to be informed on scientific issues, says the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman, and both scientists themselves and the media have roles to play in ensuring that reliable and accessible information is available.

Speaking to the Science Communicators Association of New Zealand in Auckland this morning, Sir Peter described how science now studies complex, interacting and non-linear systems – such as climate change, food and water security or non-communicable disease.

In these complex systems, science cannot produce certainty but rather operates to reduce uncertainty and make predictions about the range of possible outcomes and risks. Moreover, technological solutions to those challenges – for example genetically modified foods – often intersect with public values, and policy makers must appreciate the full range of influences – political, societal and fiscal as well as scientific – that should inform their decisions.

In this new world of complexity, said Sir Peter, there is a need for science to be better communicated to the public so that they can understand how risks and probabilities have been established and appreciate why investment in science is important for the nation.

In this process, scientists should learn to engage constructively with the media, while the media has the responsibility of communicating the processes and the limits of science, avoiding the temptation of presenting science stories as a series of 'breakthroughs' and controversies.

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