



## OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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### **Sir Peter Gluckman's report on first year's activities**

#### **Overview**

The following report summarises the activities of my Office in its first year of operation following its establishment in mid-2009. I believe it has been highly effective over this period.

The Office's place within the framework of the science and innovation system has been established and it is generally perceived as having added significant value. The need for the position was rapidly appreciated by all stakeholders and it clearly filled a void. Some roles that emerged as more prominent than when the post was first envisaged included the domestic representational role in many fora, the importance of the role internationally, and the role that the Office could play in assisting science-related agendas that crossed departments and agencies.

The Office has the core role of raising awareness of the importance of research, science and technology to the productivity agenda, to enhancing New Zealand's social and environmental well-being, and to developing its global interests.

Science increasingly deals with issues of uncertainty and probability rather than with absolutes, and offices such as this have a key but difficult role in translating complex issues for public and political understanding. These have included in the first year issues such as methamphetamine precursors, the morbidity of adolescence, and particularly global warming. The challenge is to maintain the balance of providing advice without entering the policy arena. It is important for this Office to be seen as apolitical.

I have had regular meetings with the Prime Minister and with the Minister of Research, Science and Technology, as well as many meetings with other Ministers and officials and occasional meetings with representatives of other political parties. I met frequently with the Chief Executives of the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology and of the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology. I have met with the Crown Research Institutes (CRIs), universities, the Royal Society of New Zealand, and many private sector research providers and users.

The workload is larger than originally envisaged and I am grateful that this is being addressed.

**Administrative**

The Office was established quickly and we have operated within budget. We have a highly active website and associated social networking tools. Dr Alan Beedle accepted the post as my Chief of Staff and Dr Stephen Goldson has taken on the role as my deputy part-time Advisor – he provides the Office with a broader range of experiences in the science system.

**Public engagement**

I have given over 30 public lectures – both in universities and CRIs but also to the private sector as well. All my significant speeches are on this website and many have been well reported. Most have focused on the role of research, science and technology in New Zealand – why we need to do it, how we should do it, how we should take it to scale. As the year progressed I was able to address initiatives within the sector and to give speeches on specific issues such as climate change. I have been overwhelmed with invitations from scientific societies, organisations, public and private sector groups, universities and schools to speak, join panels or participate in events – I regret being able to accept only a few.

**Science policy**

I have assisted as appropriate and requested in providing advice as the system has been undergoing change and reform. I have promoted discussion on improved technology transfer by running a workshop, writing a report and working on various schemes to assist in getting a coherent implementation process. Other areas of note where I have been able to advise include the CRI reforms, the merger of the Ministry and the Foundation, and the increased budgetary commitments in technology transfer, talent and infrastructure.

**Specific activities**

I have written a report on public-private sector interactions in science, a report on methamphetamine precursors, a paper on the current understanding of climate change, and released an interim report on adolescence. The adolescence work will take another six months to develop to the level that could inform policy analysis. That work has also served the useful purpose of exploring the boundaries between science advice and policy formation.

A major piece of work which I have started is to explore how to improve the use of scientific advice in policy making within the public service, and to improve the quality, integrity and utility of research procured both within and externally by Ministries.

I have reported to Select Committees both on my general activities and on the specific matters of immunisation rates and clinical research.

Globally, there is a rapidly rising focus on the interaction between science and diplomacy. I will co-chair with Mr John Allen, Chief Executive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, a committee to get better coordination of strategy in our international science relationships.

Without incurring significant cost to the Office, I have managed to meet with the UK Chief Scientist Sir John Beddington (twice), the Australian Chief Scientist Dr Penny Sackett (twice), senior officials in the USA including President Obama's cabinet-level advisor Dr John Holdren and the Chief Scientist of the US Department of Agriculture, Dr Richard Beachy, and with many of their associated officials and offices. I have also met with senior Chinese officials and vice-ministers, and with senior officials in Singapore. Each of these offer specific opportunities we can build upon. I have also attended the joint science commission

meetings with the USA and the European Union. I have been heavily involved with the Global Research Alliance – co-chairing the Wellington meeting and assisting the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry on scientific aspects. I have attended meetings around the Square Kilometre Array proposal and made representations as appropriate internationally.

I have started a research project jointly with the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology and the Royal Society of New Zealand to identify what the real issues in science education may be. I expect a report by the end of the year.

I have started a process of discussions to identify a strategy to improve the quality of science dissemination in the media.

Increasingly I have become a point of contact for foreign countries, for official visitors, and for companies (domestic and international) looking for opportunity.

**Final comments**

I am grateful for the confidence shown in me by the Prime Minister. I also acknowledge my own staff, the assistance provided by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the excellent relationships with the office of the Minister of Research, Science and Technology and with the major science agencies.

PD Gluckman