

News for Immediate Release: March 5, 2012

Science Embraced: Government-funded Science under the Microscope

McGuinness Institute presents first publication under new name

The McGuinness Institute is pleased to announce the publication of *Science Embraced: Government-funded Science under the Microscope*. It is the first report published by the McGuinness Institute (previously the Sustainable Future Institute) and is the ninth report of *Project 2058*.

Wendy McGuinness, Chief Executive, states 'This report seeks to contribute to a deeper discussion on science in society and the role of government in science. This discussion is important as science funding is one of the few areas where government invests solely in our country's future, highlighting the importance of science as a powerful lever for social action and improving well-being.'

Sir Paul Callaghan, in the foreword to this report writes: 'This is not just a challenge for the science sector; the New Zealand public need to be engaged and inspired, to be involved as stakeholders and investors, and to be willing to take up this challenge alongside the science community. The challenge for scientists is to articulate and act upon the values that will inspire their fellow citizens.'

The report briefly analyses the history of government-funded science in New Zealand and reviews trends in science and science policy. It then explores the government-funded science system in regard to its purpose, strategy and execution. The final sections of the report pose 30 strategic questions that highlight significant policy knots and identify a number of myths and tensions. It closes by recommending ten actions needed to deliver an optimal government-funded science system for New Zealand. The report covers the whole system, and as such is very broad. Four highlights are as follows:

1. Over the last twenty years we believe government has wrongly put its effort into the creation of a *dynamic and creative government-funded science system*, through such efforts as the establishment of Crown Research Institutes (CRIs). In contrast, the role of government in science should be two-fold: to create a stable and evidence-based government-funded science system while at the same time working with business to create a more *dynamic and creative private sector*. Further, if we are serious about transferring science technology to users, a more realistic commercial strategy may be to identify entrepreneurs and support them to find new products and services, and to develop market and niche opportunities. To this end, we suggest that development funds (those currently administered by the Innovation Board or allocated to CRIs) should be appropriated to a sector better correlated with development, such as the Health Sector or the Economic Development Sector. The Education and Science Sector should retain the Science Board funding, appropriated to MSI, and focus specifically on education and scientific inquiry.

2. The recent restructure places a great deal of power and responsibility in the hands of a few, with little clarity concerning checks and balances over decisions about the research agenda and the investment portfolio. Government must give the CRI boards and the two independent advisory boards a clear investment mandate and investment criteria including guidance on the level of due diligence required and appetite for risk. The boards should invest within the criteria and should be required to ask permission if they wish to go outside it. MSI should be required to annually report to Cabinet on the research agenda and the investment portfolio.
3. The purpose of the eight CRIs does not align with the six priority investment areas. Ideally they should be merged to form three entities: a biological development arm (a combination of AgResearch, Plant and Food, and Scion); a high-value manufacturing and services sector development arm (IRL), and an environment research arm including energy and minerals research, hazards and infrastructure research and environmental research (a combination of ESR, Landcare, NIWA and GNS Science). Further, a fourth arm should be created; the Health and Society CRI, potentially through transforming the Health Research Council.
4. Science does not adequately inform public policy. This report shows that government must work hard to ensure policy, where appropriate, is driven by science. This aligns with the findings of the *2010 Policy Expenditure Review*, which inquired into the cost, alignment, efficiency and quality of spending under the appropriations for policy advice and found that inconsistencies and gaps exist. Science and policy should work together, in what Professor Gluckman calls the 'co-production model of policy making', where policy-makers, the public and experts negotiate policy goals.

The report is available on the Institute's website (www.mcguinnessinstitute.org) or a hard copy can be purchased from the Institute's online store.

[ENDS]

For further information please contact:

Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive
McGuinness Institute
+64 4 499 8888
wmcg@mcguinnessinstitute.org
www.mcguinnessinstitute.org