

## Press Release from NZ Association of Scientists

Exclusive to the New Zealand Herald (attn: Craig Borley)

### **“Science for New Zealand” – towards collaboration and high morale in our science community, eliminating fragmentation and disillusionment**

Professor Jeff Tallon’s recent letter (signed by over 400 scientists) advocating increased science funding for knowledge-driven research, and the Government’s ‘NZ Fast Forward’ funding increase for research to support our primary industries, highlights the fundamental relevance and value of scientific research to New Zealand’s people, environment, and our economy. The NZ Association of Scientists supports both initiatives in principle, while cautioning against major increases only in primary production research at the apparent exclusion of other sectors of research of substantial benefit to New Zealand. Similarly, it is our view that the problems that bedevil research in New Zealand do not arise just from lack of funding, important though that issue is

The knowledge economy advocated by Government clearly requires large increases in funding, both from Government and business. Current input sees us trailing far behind benchmark OECD averages, and our “No. 8” mentality cannot on its own make up the difference. A knowledge economy also needs a motivated workforce, within the globally competitive science market. Appropriate remuneration is important to retain our own and our imported talent, as are attractive science career structures. The current career insecurity inflicted particularly on Science NZ Crown Research Institutes’ (CRI) staff and full-time medical researchers is counter-productive. Currently, their jobs are artificially partitioned into small pieces, each part requiring irregularly timed rebidding to sustain an aggregate. Many of our top scientists are thus sidetracked into repetitive and competitive bidding for funds instead of leading and motivating highly productive research teams.

While science is an enthralling vocation for an enquiring mind, there are some fundamental shortcomings that lead to early burn-out of scientists and fuel the brain-drain highlighted in Jeff Tallon’s letter. These include the negative aspects of competition between institutions, within a national population no bigger than that of many overseas cities. This is in contrast to the natural desire of most scientists to work collaboratively to produce the best science for New Zealand.

Rising costs of infrastructure, equipment, consumables, and salaries are not included in annual allocations to government science funding agencies. Contracts for multi-year funded research thus contain no inflation adjustment, so staff hours are reduced each and every year, leading to further fragmentation of an individual’s time.

NZAS seeks the establishment of a dynamic and motivated science community working collectively for the good of New Zealand, underpinning through innovation the nation's desired goal of sustainable development. Our immediate aim in the current debate is to articulate the concerns of researchers about the current state and future direction of science funding and policy in this country. To this end we are developing the third in a series of surveys of scientist opinions about the state of New Zealand research. We hope this will be available by August 2008 and look forward to bringing this to the attention of the Minister of RS&T/MoRST, Science NZ and other interested parties.

New Zealand Association of Scientists (<http://nzas.rsnz.org/>) is a nationwide association of practicing **research** **scientists** spanning the universities, technical institutes, Crown Research Institutes of Science NZ, government departments, industry, museums, and other **science** institutions.

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