

points. CSIRO is Australia's national science agency and one of the largest and most diverse research agencies in the world. It is an Australian government statutory authority constituted and operating under the provisions of the Science and Industry Research Act. CSIRO's primary functions are to carry out scientific research to benefit Australian industry and the community and to contribute to the achievement of national objectives. The CSIRO is accountable to the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and is part of the Innovation, Industry, Science and Research portfolio. The CSIRO Board is responsible to the Australian government for the overall governance, strategy and performance of the organisation.

The CSIRO has longstanding guidelines that its scientists and researchers do not talk about policy matters. The CSIRO chief executive, Dr Megan Clark, spoke in an interview for *The World Today* on 2 November this year and said:

I'm encouraging our scientists to speak to the public. We're training our scientists to do that and they have my personal backing. With it ... comes responsibility ... to make sure that we adhere to one of the most fundamental values of the organisation, which is the integrity of our excellent science. That's what the Australian people trust us for and we absolutely must always respect that value and never cross the line into commenting on policies.

It is the line between scientific opinion and policy commentary that has led to the recent dispute over the publishing of Dr Spash's paper on the economic benefits of carbon trading versus other means of cutting greenhouse emissions. The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Kim Carr, has stated repeatedly that the government has not said that the paper must not be published. In an interview on 5 November he said:

**Senator HURLEY** (South Australia) (5.09 pm)—It is very disappointing that the opposition would attempt to discredit the government with such flimsy allegations of censorship. Senator Abetz in his speech did not provide anything to support his claim. But what is even more disappointing is the willingness of those opposite, in the process of trying to slur the government, to bring into disrepute one of Australia's most credible and internationally acclaimed research agencies in a vain attempt to score political

At no point have I actually seen this paper, at no point has the Government said we don't want it published. I frankly take the view it's important to have a range of views in the public arena.

Senator Abetz has clearly said that he does not believe the minister but produces no evidence to refute him. Senator Carr has been adamant in his view. He is adamant that the government has played absolutely no role in the discussions between CSIRO and Dr Spash. The government has said it is entirely a matter for the CSIRO management and, in the interests of research freedom, it is completely inappropriate for the government to intervene. The CSIRO is reviewing the paper in line with standard internal processes which will determine whether it can be published.

The notion of peer review is central to the research enterprise. Researchers test the quality and validity of their work by submitting it for critical assessment by their peers. The CSIRO has its own internal peer review processes, which have been established to maintain the standards of excellence which have made the CSIRO an international research icon. They have been established to ensure that researchers work collaboratively and collectively to achieve the best possible results. Certainly these processes should be allowed to be progressed without the interference of the government. That is the minister's view and that is the government's view.

It is interesting to note that this is not the first time the issue of the line between scientific research and policy commentary at CSIRO has been explored and the term 'censorship' has been tossed around. Not surprisingly, one issue around which this censorship controversy previously centred was also climate change. What may have escaped the attention of those opposite—certainly, they did not refer to it—was that the allegations of CSIRO censorship were in 2006 being pointed directly at the Howard government.

Indeed, the 2006 controversy developed over claims by Dr Graeme Pearman, a former CSIRO climate director, that he had been censored by the Howard government when talking about the need to dramatically reduce emissions. In an interview with *Four Corners* on 13 February 2006 he claimed to have been censored over half-a-dozen times in one year and he directly related that to government intervention. The whole television program was devoted to government intervention in scientific work. The CSIRO on that occasion also rejected this claim and at the time, in much the same terms, as now they argued that the scientists were free to speak on scientific evidence from their research, but needed to be cautious of crossing the line into criticism or advocacy of policy positions. So, exactly the same circumstances about exactly the same issue, despite Senator Abetz trying to make some conspiracy link about it being climate change, but different government and the same response from the CSIRO. Senator Abetz's argument is a house of cards.

But, in fact, the one issue where there was found to be government interference also involved the former government. That was a scandalous situation that occurred in 2004 and 2005 when the then minister for education, Brendan Nelson, secretly vetoed 10 research proposals which had been judged worthy of support by independent peer reviews. These proposals were torpedoed by the direct intervention of a government minister. That was in another department. We are dealing with the CSIRO. Their response to allegations of Howard government involvement was precisely the same as the allegations raised by Senator Abetz to Rudd government involvement at this stage. They were both refuted on the same grounds with the same reason. Nothing that Senator Abetz said contradicted that, there was no evidence in this case that the government minister had

directly interfered or that anyone else in the Rudd government had interfered. I do not believe that the scientist involved, Dr Spash, has made any statement about government interference in contrast to Dr Graeme Pearman's former allegation.

That leaves us with the incontrovertible fact that the CSIRO have maintained a consistent line. The CSIRO are our primary scientific research organisation. They provide advice and information to the government, to parliamentarians across the political spectrum and to the broader Australian community. It is important that they can be frank and fearless in the public disclosure of the scientific findings of their research. However, it is equally important that the CSIRO and the important work that they undertake are not seen in any way to be politically partisan as this would irrefutably damage their reputation for integrity and independence.

The CSIRO have a glowing reputation to maintain both domestically and internationally. A couple of testimonials demonstrate how important maintaining this reputation is for the Australia brand and the CSIRO brand. The Western Australian Water Corporation said:

The benefit is we've got access to a huge body of very well experienced scientific knowledge and there is an independence about CSIRO and a credibility with Australians that is very important.

Similarly, Professor Bernard Bowden, Chair of the Marine and Atmospheric Research Panel said:

The Panel was impressed by the quality of the scientific staff and the importance of the work being undertaken for both international and domestic outcome orientated research.

Dr Mary E. Clutter, former Assistant Director of the United States National Science Foundation said:

I was tremendously impressed both by the science that was world class and with facilities we visited,

also world class. In addition I found the science management and leadership ... comparable with strategic planning anywhere in the world.

Again, I say it is deeply disappointing and frankly irresponsible for those opposite to make these unfounded allegations against the government but more importantly to question the integrity of the CSIRO, given their own experience with exactly the same issue. To question the integrity of the CSIRO's handling of these issues is to do exactly that—to drag the CSIRO into an ugly political argument.

Rather than applying censorship to research agencies, the government have acted in a number of ways to safeguard research freedom. We have restored the autonomy of the Australian Research Council by appointing an expert stakeholder group to advise it on strategy and policy and by making the process for the ARC's grant approval process more transparent—no more ministers coming in and making arbitrary decisions. We have also cancelled the previous government's ill-conceived Research Quality Framework, which was also open to political manipulation, and revised the ARC guidelines to ensure that the minister cannot intervene in ARC recommendations. We have ensured also in the event that the minister declines a recommendation from the ARC, that he must make that decision public and describe why it was taken, and we have also introduced charters for our public research agencies including the CSIRO.

So, contrary to the allegations of this particular matter of public importance, the Rudd Labor government are working to ensure that our research agencies continue their outstanding contribution to the domestic and international scientific community. CSIRO are delivering the full spectrum of research Australia needs to tackle climate change through programs such as its Climate Adaptation, Energy Transformed, Water for a

Healthy Country and Wealth from Oceans flagships, as well as its divisions of Land and Water, Marine and Atmospheric Research and Sustainable Ecosystems.

Forty-four per cent of the CSIRO's total research effort is directed towards achieving an environmentally sustainable Australia. The CSIRO's views on climate change were quoted in the media over 3,000 times last year, so their efforts are fundamental to public understanding and debate on the science of climate change. Eighteen CSIRO researchers contributed to the 2007 assessment report of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, eight of them as lead authors. So perhaps it is the contribution to and recognition of climate change by the CSIRO that is really the major problem for those opposite. In trying to run that agenda, they have chosen to try and denigrate not only the government and government ministers but also Australia's premier scientific research organisation, which the opposition have many times lauded and congratulated—but they are willing to drag its reputation down in a grubby political attempt to denigrate the government.

**Senator Bushby**—It's political interference.

**Senator HURLEY**—It is a political matter by the opposition and one that is not supported by anyone on this side, because this government has been the one that has supported the CSIRO and its research efforts. Indeed, in the last budget the government increased funding to CSIRO by \$43 million, or 6.4 per cent, and allocated more money to the national research vessel—\$120 million. It provided \$30 million for an expanded Atlas of Living Australia, \$80 million for a new Square Kilometre Array science centre, \$36 million for the Australian Synchrotron and so on. The government has demonstrated time and time again its support for the CSIRO and

its determination to see it as an independent research organisation.