



## **National Research Priorities panel misses the mark**

New Zealand Association of Scientists Co-President Prof Troy Baisden says, “Unfortunately, the panel appointed misses the mark – this represents a waste of great talent and mana by trying to build on broken foundations.”

“This is not the panel needed to address the nation’s research challenges outlined in the cabinet paper initiating Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways. (Excerpt Attached)

The panel includes eminent scientists and innovators, and Māori and Pacific leaders well suited to govern equitably in innovation in health, technology and society. However, they lack the economic and environmental expertise needed to give the public – and the governments they elect – confidence in managing responses to challenges such as climate change and natural hazards.

It is clearly time to revisit our association’s recommendation to move science and research back into a stand-alone ministry. The domination of business and economic development within the super-ministry, MBIE, turns again and again to pipe-dreams at the expense of the foundations of science and careers as well as the trust our society wants to place in the research that will guide us through issues like climate change. .

Connecting innovation and better including Māori is essential, but cannot succeed without understanding the challenges faced by the only developed nation dependent on exporting primary products as well as managing unique biodiversity and connections to the southern ocean in the face of climate change and other threats.

Furthermore, the Panel lacks sufficient connections to our institutions and early career researchers to understand the deep cracks and dysfunction that continue to grow in our research system.

Our university sector is in crisis. Across all our institutions, careers and research have been disrupted as healthy funding contests have evolved into hypercompetition and capricious layers of management seeking ever greater funding, with less time and resource for research.

We were looking forward to progress on the new National Research Priorities and the announcement of the panel. It signals significant commitment to shift research towards the big challenges facing Aotearoa in the decades ahead.

Such a new commitment should be great news. Identifying the major priorities for the nation is the best way to get the public and the governments they elect to support the substantial research investment needed to move the nation forward, compete in global trade, and sustain our wellbeing.

Ayesha Verrall, [said](#)<sup>1</sup> her party's, and the Government's, policy on science and the pandemic is, "investment, not austerity." We doubt the Panel process can lead to a strong case for public investment that is both compelling and achievable.

Wider discussion is needed on how the intent and promise of Te Ara Paerangi Future can be restored.

Immediate focus should be on stabilising careers, important work, and mechanisms for achieving excellence that are starving – forcing our best scientists to make excruciating choices between unpaid overtime and crippling cuts.

The expanding cracks in the foundations of our research system must be addressed. The NZAS calls on the Government, the panel and parties contesting the upcoming election to work together toward goals that will stabilise the foundations of our research system:

- Create accountability and reduce outrageous overheads to international norms
- Support the careers of our workforce by stabilising funding to people and their work
- Recreate leadership from a stand alone ministry focussed on science and research

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<sup>1</sup> <https://scientists.org.nz/news/9210641>

**Appendix:** The panel does not appear well matched to address the original intent of Te Ara Paerangi's founding Cabinet paper ([Link to cabinet full paper](#)).

### **Proposal**

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet agreement to begin a programme of work on future pathways for our Research, Science and Innovation (RSI) system.

### **Relation to government priorities**

- 2 RSI has a vital role in supporting the delivery of government priorities in all areas to build an inclusive, sustainable and productive future. This includes environmental challenges, transforming the built environment and sectors of our economy, and underpinning our ability to respond to increasing threats to resilience, human health and well-being.

### **Executive Summary**

- 3 Meeting the challenges and opportunities of the future will require harnessing the collective capability of our Research, Science and Innovation (RSI) system, to tackle the complex and interdependent challenges that are central to New Zealand's future. These include:
  - Intractable environmental challenges such as combating climate change and biodiversity loss, and sustainable and efficient water and land use, that require a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach;
  - Generating sustained improvements to our health and wellbeing;
  - Responding to government priorities in areas such as transforming our built environment to alleviate the housing crisis, and energy transitions to meet our future needs; and
  - Leveraging future economic opportunities in a rapidly changing world to support our recovery from COVID-19 and shape a future economy that is more productive, resilient and diverse. This includes supporting the transformation of traditional sectors in our economy (e.g. diversifying and adding value in food and fibre), and supporting the growth of knowledge intensive industries (e.g. aerospace, advanced manufacturing and medical technologies).
- 4 Our RSI system is not well configured to meet these challenges and opportunities. In the last term of Government, we took a first significant step to address a major part of this problem by introducing our R&D Tax Incentive. Over the coming years, we