

Plenary session: Five Chief Scientists.

Australia's State Chief Scientists: Science Policy and the Role of Science

Communication Hear Australia's five state Chief Scientists talk about their roles, how effective have they been in achieving their goals, and what directions they will take for the future. Most importantly you will hear their views on the role of science communication in their work and for their state, and what directions they see for science communication. This panel discussion may provide new opportunities for working with individual Chief Scientists or with them as a group.

Jesse Shore (session producer), Science Communicator, Prismatic Sciences & ASC President

Toss Gascoigne (chair), Director, Toss Gascoigne and Associates

Mary O'Kane (panel), NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer, Industry & Investment NSW

Professor Mary O'Kane is the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer and Executive Chairman of Mary O'Kane & Associates Pty Ltd, a Sydney-based company providing strategic advice to governments, universities and the private sector. She is also Chair of the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy, Chair of the Development Gateway and the Development Gateway International, and Chair of the CRC for Spatial Information. Professor O'Kane was Vice-Chancellor and President of Adelaide University from 1996-2001 and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) from 1994-96. She is a Fellow and Vice-President of the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and an Honorary Fellow of Engineers, Australia.

Don Bursill (panel), Chief Scientist of South Australia, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology

Professor Don Bursill is the Chief Scientist for South Australia. He has 40 years' experience in the water industry mainly with the SA Water Corporation, stepping down in 2005 as its Chief Scientist. He was CEO of the Co-operative Research Centre for Water Quality and Treatment for 11 years and has been a member of the South Australian Premier's Climate Change Council. Don chaired the Water Quality Advisory Committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council which sets the national drinking water quality guidelines, among other functions. He has won many awards and honours for his services to water research and water resources management in Australia.

Graham Mitchell (panel), Chief Scientist of Victoria, Foursight Associates Pty Ltd

Dr Graham Mitchell is recognised as one of Australia's leading biological scientists. After obtaining a PhD from the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI) in 1969 he went on to establish a new program there on the immunology of parasitism. This program became a major component of the global effort to develop new tools for the control of parasitic diseases, and of the 'biotechnology revolution'. His

diverse career includes being Director of the Royal Melbourne Zoological Gardens, Director of Research in the R&D Division of CSL Limited, and is an advisor on innovation to the Victorian, Tasmanian and Northern Territory Governments.

Lyn Beazley (panel), Western Australian Chief Scientist , Government of Western Australia

Professor Lyn Beazley was appointed Chief Scientist of Western Australia in 2006. She was awarded Officer of the Order of Australia in January 2009 and made a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering later that year. Lyn is a member of the new Technology and Industry Advisory Council (TIAC) to the Western Australian Government. In March 2011, she was inducted into the inaugural Western Australian Women's Hall of Fame. After her education at Oxford and Edinburgh Universities, Lyn built up an internationally renowned research team that focused on recovery from brain damage, much of the research done at the University of Western Australia.

Geoff Garrett (panel), Queensland Chief Scientist, Queensland Government

Dr Geoff Garrett was appointed Queensland Chief Scientist from January 2011. A Cambridge graduate in metallurgy and an academic for 13 years, Geoff led two of the world's major national research institutions - CSIR in South Africa (1995- 2000) and CSIRO in Australia (2001-2008). A former South African 'Engineer of the Year' (1999), he is a recipient of the Centenary Medal for service to Australian society through science. In June 2008 he was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Advice to panel

Format

The session will be conversational. The audience is interested in the role you play, the people you talk to and the audiences you aim to reach. How much of your job is about communication? How well-defined is the role of a Chief Scientist?

They will want to hear your views on the questions which arise in discussions on science communication. What are we trying to change through effective science communication? Are we succeeding? If more resources were made available, how would you recommend they be applied?

The conversation will last for about an hour, and then the audience will be invited to ask their own questions, in a session running 75 to 90 minutes. At the end of the formal session, we invite you to mingle with the audience over afternoon tea.

The question of using slides has arisen. My strong preference is not to use slides because it would interrupt a conversational session.

Below is a list of questions and issues that are likely to come up in the conversation.

1. Your role as Chief Scientist
2. What the States hope to gain from making these appointments
3. A description of some of the jobs you do as Chief Scientist, and the people you most commonly deal with – ministers, research agencies, politicians, bureaucrats
4. The position of Chief Scientist in Australia is relatively new. Do you feel the job is still evolving?
5. Why is science communication important?
6. What would effective science communication change about our society?
7. The *Inspiring Australia* report said science communication activities needed a better sense of direction. It talked about coordination and refocusing. Did the report get it right?
8. Are you involved in *Inspiring Australia* activities?
9. Ian Chubb talks about his need as the Commonwealth Chief Scientist to persuade important people: “We need people who can talk persuasively to politicians and public officials because ultimately it’s the quality of the advice that’s given that influences the public policy and the outcomes in a way that benefits this country,” he said. (*The Conversation*, 21 April 2011). Are policy people your main focus?
10. Do you think fund-granting bodies such as the NH&MRC and the ARC should beef up their requirements for scientists to communicate?
11. What expectation should we have for scientists to talk about their work with those outside the scientific world eg politicians, the public, interest groups?
12. There are some disturbing signs: the declining number of students enrolling in basic sciences, the rise of scepticism
13. Sections of the media have been criticised for the way they have covered some big science-based issues, notably climate change. What are your views about the way the media does science?
14. How can science communicators help you achieve your goals?

The session begins at 2 pm at the Sydney Masonic Centre, 66 Goulburn St Sydney.