



Australian Academy of Science

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11 August 2008

Senator The Honourable Mitch Fifield
Chair, Senate Inquiry into Academic Freedom
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

RE: Senate Inquiry into Academic Freedom

Dear Senator Fifield,

The Australian Academy of Science welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee's Inquiry into Academic Freedom. As the independent body of Australia's leading research scientists, the Academy brings together experts from universities, industry and government. It is therefore well placed to comment on academic freedom and how it relates to government policy. In particular, the Academy notes the following points of significant importance to academic freedom:

1. Science makes the most significant advances in an atmosphere of free and critical discussion. Therefore, academic freedom is of crucial importance, particularly in research at universities, institutes and CSIRO.
2. Governments and their representatives have a responsibility to set general research priorities on behalf of their citizens. However, it is inappropriate for governments and their representatives to interfere with scientific peer review processes or with details of academic debate. That is the role of the academic sector.
3. In very rare cases, it may be appropriate for government to implement 'reserve powers' to direct research. This may be the case with some research that has security implications. However, it is inappropriate for governments and their representatives to interfere in genuine academic debate and to intervene with the grant processes of the ARC, NHMRC or CSIRO.

The Academy welcomes Senator Kim Carr's recent initiation of dialogue with the scientific community to discuss rights and responsibilities for scientists in public research agencies. The charters to be developed from discussions such as the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS) *Forum of the rights and responsibilities of scientists* in February 2008, are necessary for a productive relationship between researchers and government.

The Academy would be pleased to provide verbal evidence relating to academic freedom to the Senate Committee, and looks forward to the committee's report in November 2008.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Philip W. Kuchel, FAA
Secretary, Science Policy