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By: MR MARIL PATERSON
SECRETARY, DIISR

Date: 21/2/2008

Dear Halya

Thank you for the advice on Clearance of Media Releases.

The majority of the around 300 media releases CSIRO produces each year report on our research and fall into the category of 'agency press releases of a technical nature' or 'releases of a more routine nature'.

While CSIRO releases may relate to research in areas such as climate change, they are consistent with our public comment policy (revised in 2006 following media suggestions that CSIRO or the government were in some way gagging scientists). The public comment policy (attached) encourages scientists to discuss their science but, consistent with the *Government Guidelines for Official Witnesses before Parliamentary Committees and Related Matters* does not permit any comment, positive or negative, on the policies of any government.

In most cases CSIRO's media releases announce either a new publication that is reporting significant research results or an important event. Under the Uhrig reform 'Statement of Expectations' provided to CSIRO by the then minister in June 2007, CSIRO informs the minister in advance prior to 'releasing reports or papers relating to Australian Government policies or programmes'. Similarly, when CSIRO is arranging a significant event that is likely to become the subject of a media release, we would be inviting the minister or one of his colleagues to the event.

It may be useful for you to know that in addition to its own media releases, CSIRO issues around 50 further releases a year jointly with its partners. Moreover, our partners and other organisations (including clients) may issue releases that refer to CSIRO and its research.

On occasion we may be operating to very tight deadlines to issue a release. This is especially the case when research findings are to appear in a prestigious journal such as *Nature* or *Science* and we receive very short notice of its imminent publication.

I hope this provides the information that you need.

Regards,

Huw Morgan.

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Policy classification	Number	2006/03
	Title	Policy on Public Comment by CSIRO Staff
	Level	2
	Category	Science and Research
	Applies to	All staff
	Issue status	Supersedes Policy on Public Comment by CSIRO Staff Members 2004/06 - July 2004.
Policy description	Overview and purpose	CSIRO's fundamental purpose is to achieve positive impact from science on behalf of Australia - and our ability to do so ultimately depends upon our integrity and our reputation. The core of CSIRO's overall standing is its externally validated and peer-reviewed science, and the communication of that science for the benefit of Australia. Underlying CSIRO's core values is commitment to the open exchange of scientific information. This policy aims to assist CSIRO staff in their external communication activities.
	Policy review	Policy to be reviewed regularly.
Policy statements	Policy statement 1	Scientists are CSIRO's frontline communicators. They are encouraged to communicate the outcomes and implications of their scientific work and, where relevant, policy options and scenarios stemming from their scientific findings.
	Policy statement 2	Prior to contributing to public debate or to government inquiries CSIRO staff should consult widely within the Organisation, and where diversity of scientific views exists make reference to the range of scientific perspectives held within CSIRO. Staff will comply with CSIRO's formal procedures and protocols for co-ordination of submissions to government and other inquiries, and, where they exist, associated obligations for confidentiality.
	Policy statement 3	CSIRO staff should not advocate, defend or publicly canvass the merits of government or opposition policies (including policies of previous Commonwealth governments, or State or local or foreign governments).
	Policy statement 4	If a staff member is commenting in a private capacity, he or she should state clearly that it is a personal opinion rather than an official view of CSIRO.
	Policy statement 5	If a staff member intends to comment publicly on behalf of CSIRO, he or she will advise line managers and communication officers. In some circumstances (for example, requests from the media) timeliness of response is important, and in such cases this advice can be provided immediately after comment is made.
	Policy statement 6	Comments to the media about the Organisation's overall directions, operation, strategies and financial position should only be made by appropriately delegated staff.
Key roles and	Policy owner	Dr Steve Morton, Group Executive

responsibilities	[Relevant points for other staff that policy applies to]	This policy applies to all staff. Line managers, especially Chiefs, and Communication Managers have a specific responsibility to assist staff in this area.
Policy implementation and authority	Implementation date	1 August 2006
	Authority	Dr Geoff Garrett
Further references	Related Procedures and Guidelines	<u>Code of Conduct</u> <u>Whistleblower Scheme</u>
	Other policy references	<u>Public Comment Review</u>

Policy statement 1	Scientists are CSIRO's frontline communicators. They are encouraged to communicate the outcomes and implications of their scientific work and, where relevant, policy options and scenarios stemming from their scientific findings.
Supporting information – Procedures	<p>External validation, particularly peer review, is central to assuring the quality of our science; hence, peer-reviewed science should be the foundation for any public comment. The peer-review processes to be followed will be set by line management and be consistent with the accepted external validation practices of the particular field of science and engineering.</p> <p>If a staff member intends to comment publicly as a CSIRO scientist, he or she should advise the line manager and local communication officer. In some circumstances (for example, requests from the media) timeliness of response is important, and in such circumstance this advice can be provided immediately after comment is made.</p> <p>Scientists should use the skills of CSIRO communicators, and seek their advice in considering how best to communicate clearly and engagingly to a wide range of audiences. Training will be made available, and it is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that staff who are expected to engage in public comment receive adequate training and support.</p>

Supporting information –**Guidelines**

In a world of rapidly evolving public debate and discourse, a national research agency such as CSIRO should discharge its public role by being readily and rapidly available to provide information on the most up-to-date science and technology, and its implications for the nation.

CSIRO scientists are our primary communicators on all matters relating to science, and all scientists are encouraged to talk about their science, and to explain it to other scientists, the Australian community, overseas audiences, and potential end-users such as policy-makers and commercial entities.

The rigour of external scientific review is a key element both of our research and our reputation. Hence, CSIRO scientists are particularly encouraged to talk about completed work, especially work published or accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals, and to take care when speaking about new ideas or research in progress (CSIRO's reputation is based on what we have done, and on the adoption by end-users of our work, rather than on what we have plans to do).

Care is also required when speaking about work with commercial potential.

As explained in subsequent Policy Statements, CSIRO staff may discuss options for policy development based upon scientific work, and explore scenarios stemming from such options, while avoiding direct comment upon government or opposition policy.

CSIRO staff need to exercise judgement when interacting with the media. CSIRO staff should also be aware that, apart from live radio, their comments may be edited to make someone else's point rather than their own.

CSIRO staff should be aware when participating in external blogs, 'webinars', email lists and web-based discussion groups that their views will be seen as CSIRO views if they use their work-based email to do so. Personal opinions should be sent from a private email address.

As part of our commitment to explain CSIRO's science and to be accountable for our work, calls from media should be answered by an appropriate staff member within an hour, even if the information is currently unavailable or will take time to get. This will contribute to maintaining a good working relationship with the media. It is already standard practice within many government departments, and within CSIRO's Media Liaison Unit.

Relevant links

http://intranet.csiro.au/doco/policy/pc2006_03.htm

Policy statement 2

Prior to contributing to public debate or to government inquiries CSIRO staff should consult widely within the Organisation, and where diversity of scientific views exists make reference to the range of scientific perspectives held within CSIRO. Staff will comply with CSIRO's formal procedures and protocols for co-ordination of submissions to government and other inquiries, and, where they exist, associated obligations for confidentiality.

Supporting information – Procedures

CSIRO staff will consult with Divisional line managers and communicators for advice about other research activities within CSIRO that may overlap with or complement the area of proposed public comment.

	Government Relations should be consulted about procedures, protocols and co-ordination of submissions to government and other public inquiries, and any associated obligations for confidentiality.
Supporting information – Guidelines	Staff need to be aware of the various processes by which CSIRO responds to formal requests for input to policy development. It is important that when submissions are made all relevant areas of our science have a chance to contribute and the diversity of views is represented publicly. Government Relations and the Science into Policy Unit will provide detailed guidelines on procedures and protocols for staff, through each Divisional communicator.
Relevant links	http://intranet.csiro.au/intranet/govrelations/Submission.htm http://intranet.csiro.au/intranet/govrelations/Appearing.htm

Policy statement 3	CSIRO staff should not advocate, defend or publicly canvass the merits of government or opposition policies (including policies of previous Commonwealth governments, or State or local or foreign governments).
Supporting information – Procedures	Staff who have been asked or wish to contribute scientific input to policy development will seek advice from their line managers and local communicators regarding the various mechanisms available.
Supporting information – Guidelines	<p>As representatives of CSIRO, staff should avoid making direct comment for or against government or opposition policy⁴. In this respect, CSIRO policy may differ from some Australian universities; CSIRO differs in that it is a Commonwealth Government agency. This gives CSIRO the advantage that it can participate directly in the internal policy development processes of government.</p> <p>As Commonwealth officials CSIRO employees are bound by the <i>Government Guidelines for Official Witnesses before Parliamentary Committees and Related Matters – November 1989</i>. These guidelines state that Commonwealth officials:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Should not advocate, defend or canvass the merits of government policies (including policies of previous Commonwealth governments, or State or foreign governments.)</i></p> <p>Another reason for avoiding taking a public position on government or opposition policy is that to do so immediately takes CSIRO into an advocacy position. This does not mean that CSIRO should refrain from providing information <i>about</i> controversial issues – only that such information should be based on solid scientific research. Advocacy, on the other hand, removes our mantle of steadfast commitment to the facts as best they can be established and can create the perception that we are performing research to support a particular position, rather than to challenge existing knowledge in an impartial search for progress. Our reputation stems precisely from that steadfast impartiality; and our reputation for honesty and rigour would decline in proportion to the degree to which we became perceived as advocates instead of unbiased and rigorous providers of advice.</p> <p>CSIRO staff may discuss options for policy development based upon scientific work, and explore scenarios stemming from such options, while avoiding direct comment upon policy.</p> <p>As well as participating in policy-development processes that are open only to</p>

Government agencies, CSIRO can and does contribute to public policy debates such as those run by parliamentary or independent committees. In doing this CSIRO staff should contribute in a way that builds upon all the expertise available in the Organisation, by exploring the full range of scientific perspectives about the issues under examination.

Relevant links

Government Guidelines for Official Witnesses before Parliamentary Committees and Related Matters – November 1989.
http://wopared.pari.net/Senate/committee/wit_sub/gov_ext.htm

¹ "Policy" encompasses any Government or Opposition position that the parties will (or will not) take a particular course of action or act to achieve particular outcomes. The position may be made public through speeches, party platform documents, policy statements, interviews, or other means.

Policy statement 4

If a staff member is commenting in a private capacity, he or she should state clearly that it is a personal opinion rather than an official view of CSIRO.

Supporting information – Procedures

Supporting information – Guidelines

CSIRO staff have the same right as all Australian citizens to speak as an individual rather than as a representative of their employer.

All staff, especially senior scientists and managers, should be mindful of the reality of modern media, such that they are likely to be identified as being employed by CSIRO whether they wish to be or not.

Staff will not use CSIRO branded stationery or email systems for external correspondence in which a private opinion is expressed.

Relevant links

Policy statement 5

If a staff member intends to comment publicly on behalf of CSIRO, he or she will advise line managers and communication officers. In some circumstances (for example, requests from the media) timeliness of response is important, and in such cases this advice can be provided immediately after comment is made.

**Supporting
information
– Procedures**

CSIRO staff will advise their line managers and local communication officers of any request for public comment to the media or government and other public inquiries.

Communicators will maintain a record of all notified requests for public comment and notify relevant line managers of any emerging issues that might require handling from a whole-of-CSIRO perspective.

Government Relations will co-ordinate submissions to government and other public inquiries.

Training on working effectively with the media is to be made available; it is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that staff who are expected to engage in public comment receive adequate training and support. There are several areas for which training prior to public comment is particularly relevant, including:

- a. work that is likely to attract a high level of community interest;
- b. work that is contentious within the research community;
- c. work that is potentially commercially useful; and
- d. work that may directly or indirectly affect incumbent Government or Opposition policy at Commonwealth, State or Local Government levels.

Supporting information

Guidelines

CSIRO is vitally concerned with gaining impact from its research through effective communication. Published research which sits on the shelf is less useful than research which is adopted in a timely way, whether in the commercial or policy-related domains. Bringing research to relevant policy makers is a core CSIRO role; hence, CSIRO staff may discuss options for policy development based upon scientific work, and explore scenarios stemming from such options.

Equally, CSIRO staff are encouraged to think about potential unintended consequences of various possible approaches to explaining policy-related research. CSIRO's communication professionals and senior managers are an important source of advice, and should be consulted before communicating in the public arena. Scientists will form and maintain a close working relationship with their nearest communicator.

New staff, and scientists completing work in an area new to them, should discuss with their project leader and local communicator how best to achieve impact from the communication of their science. This may be as simple as submitting papers to peer-reviewed journals, or as sophisticated as a full outreach campaign once the work is accepted for publication.

In summary:

1. Consult with communications staff and line managers.
2. If the timeline is very short, because of the journalist's deadline, contact your Divisional communicator as soon as possible afterwards.
3. Prepare your material carefully such that your comments accurately reflect externally validated science in plain English.
4. If your research happens to fall in that small number of potentially contentious domains, plan your comments carefully in association with your line managers and communication professionals.
5. Carefully consider exploring, if your science allows it, policy options for dealing with the challenge or opportunity emerging from your research; however, avoid making prescriptive comments about Government or Opposition policy.
6. Again in consultation with your line managers and communication professionals, consider whether research in other parts of CSIRO might be relevant in your public comments, and establish contact with those other groups where necessary.
7. In anticipation of this aspect of your work, undertake media training, particularly in situations where your science lies in an area of considerable public interest.

Relevant links

Policy statement 6

Comments to the media about the Organisation's overall directions, operation, strategies and financial position should only be made by appropriately delegated staff.

Supporting information – Procedures

Appropriately delegated staff who would normally respond to requests for public comment about such matters are members of the Executive Team, the Executive Management Council, and Corporate General Managers. Requests for comment on the Organisation's overall directions, operation, strategies and financial position should therefore be referred through your line manager to these appropriately delegated people.

Staff are able to contribute to scientific and organisational planning at Stream, Theme and Divisional or Flagship level. If a staff member wishes to discuss such issues further, this should take place through your Chief, Director or General Manager, or through local consultative arrangements.

If for some reason a staff member has a genuine concern that a breach of the Code of Conduct is being inadequately addressed and feels unable to discuss it with his or her line manager, then CSIRO considers the Whistleblower Scheme to be an appropriate approach to take. Whistleblowing refers to the reporting, in the public interest, of information which alleges a breach of the CSIRO Code of Conduct by a CSIRO staff member. The aim of the Whistleblower Scheme is to create an environment where people feel comfortable raising concerns about compliance within the Organisation, and to provide an appropriate and effective mechanism for reporting and responding to such concerns.

Supporting information – Guidelines

Relevant links