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Mr John Carter

Secretary

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

22 MAR 2004

Dear Mr Carter

Thank you for your letter of 17 March 2004 to my Department in which you advised that the Committee has requested Chief Scientist, Dr Robin Batterham provide your members with a private briefing.

I wish to confirm earlier advice conveyed to you by Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary of the Department, dated 17 February 2004 that it is not appropriate for the Chief Scientist to appear before Senate committees.

I believe the Labor Party and Greens are seeking to manipulate your Committee for outright political motives in an attempt to damage the reputation of an eminent Australian. The Chief Scientist has no case to answer in relation to an alleged conflict of interest and the requested appearance is more about promoting the agenda of a minority of members of your Committee. This position stems from their opposition to anyone who is seen to have links to the resources sector.

In terms of precedent, it is my understanding that the previous Chief Scientist who also served in a part-time capacity was not required to appear before Senate committees.

The Committee should be aware that Dr Batterham:

- is contracted to the Commonwealth through the Minister for Science. He is neither a public servant, nor part of the Department.
- has a remit to promote linkages and to provide independent policy advice to Government across a number of portfolios; and
- he has no Government decision making authority and no role on budgetary matters or line management within the Department.

My view in these matters is unaffected by the question of whether the Chief Scientist appears in a public session or in private.

As previously indicated, questions from the Committee relating to the Chief Scientist's activities can be addressed to officers of the Department of Education, Science and Training.

Yours sincerely