

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist**

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**Organisation:** World Wide Fund for Nature Australia (WWF)

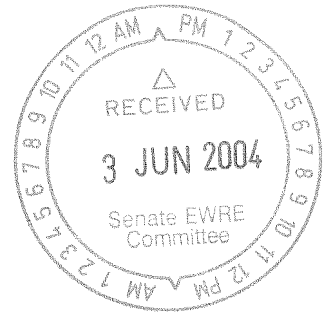
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## **Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References**

### **Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist**

#### **Submission from WWF Australia**

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The following is a formal submission by WWF Australia, to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist.

WWF Australia (World Wide Fund for Nature Australia) has worked as an independent force to protect Australia's natural environment for over 25 years. WWF works through collaboration rather than confrontation across economic, political and cultural boundaries. With the help of more than 50,000 supporters across Australia, WWF Australia is currently working on over 180 projects, raising and investing more than \$11 million annually in conservation programs.

WWF Australia welcomes the opportunity to forward a submission of interest to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist and supports the view that a potential conflict of interest arises from the dual employment role of the Chief Scientist.

#### **Position undertaken in a part-time capacity**

The role of the Chief Scientist is to directly advise the Prime Minister across a broad range of science and innovation with the aim of promoting linkages between science, industry and government. The key agenda for this position is to ensure that public investment in science and technology is properly focussed on issues of national priority.

Currently, this position is being undertaken in a part-time capacity (2 days per week). WWF Australia is of belief that this time frame is not sufficient to deliver the level of detail required for this high demanding role and should be reassigned into a full-time position.

## **Conflict of interest on dual positions**

WWF is concerned that a conflict of interest between Dr Batterham's dual role as the Chief Scientist and Chief Technologist for Rio Tinto is inherent.

In his role as Chief Scientist, Dr Batterham is expected to consider a range of policies and research objectives for the basis of providing sound advice for the good of the Australian nation. With particular reference to global warming, greenhouse gas abatement policies and strategies must include support for a wide portfolio of promising technologies. This would include combining a range of available technologies such as renewables, energy efficiency and high efficient fossil fuel generation. WWF believes that a multi-tiered, multi-technology approach is the only way to cut emissions by the level required to prevent dangerous climate change.

In his role as Chief Technologist for Rio Tinto, Dr Batterham is expected to provide sound advice to ensure the long-term viability of the company. The company's vested interest is in mining coal resources, which is an integral part of the company's profitability. With particular reference to climate change, Rio Tinto would strongly benefit from policy support and subsidies for fossil fuel technologies such as geosequestration.

It is clear that a conflict of interest is likely to arise with the decision making processes for each role and is summarised in the following:-

- It is highly improbable that an individual is capable of carrying out two related but disparate positions without having conflicting overlap;
- It is impractical to suggest that an individual can unequivocally separate decision making processes between these roles;
- With specific reference to the abatement of greenhouse gas emissions, the vested interest for Rio Tinto is not necessarily the same for the Australian nation. As these interests can conflict, so too does the decision making process.

## **Tackling climate change – an unbalanced strategy:**

WWF is concerned that the Chief Scientist and the governing PMSEIC body is inappropriately focusing on only one promising but yet to be proven technology to reduce greenhouse emissions – coal fuelled energy with geosequestration.

This is demonstrated through the increasing evidence of government support and plans to rely on geologic storage of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) at the deferment of policies that aim to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and promote energy efficient and renewable technologies. The growing Australian government support for geosequestration is illustrated in the following:-<sup>1</sup>

- 'Capture and sequestration of CO<sub>2</sub>' is considered to be one of Australia's National Research Priorities;
- The recent establishment of the CRC for Greenhouse Gas Technologies which will focus almost exclusively on CO<sub>2</sub> capture and geosequestration and;
- The dominant role of CO<sub>2</sub> capture and geosequestration in the US-Australia Climate Action Partnership.

### Problems with relying only on the geosequestration fix

WWF supports policies that promote clean renewable energies, energy efficiency and energy conservation as the ultimate solution to climate change.<sup>2</sup> Geosequestration may have a role

as a short-term “bridging technology” as a means to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> during the transitional period to a carbon free energy supply system. WWF’s acceptance of this technology would be on the basis that:

- Carbon dioxide can be stored safely and permanently in locations that would not allow leakage;
- The role of geosequestration would need to be assessed via independent scientific review and;
- Carbon dioxide storage must be proven to not interfere or have a negative impact on biodiversity.

The emphasis on geosequestration as the only technical solution to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is fraught with danger. Considerable research into this technology is still required as there are significant uncertainties, including:

- Geosequestration is an unproven technology;
- To be effective, storage systems must not allow for more than trivial amount of leakage for over thousands of years<sup>3</sup> and;
- Current predictions suggest that it could not envisage the start of geosequestration deployment before 2015.<sup>4</sup> By then it may already too late to avoid a warming of more than 2°C which WWF believes is a dangerous level of climate change.

### **In summary**

- By placing an emphasis on geosequestration as the technical fix to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, Dr Batterham as Chief Scientist, is not providing sound advice in the interest of the nation. Dr Batterham is however, acting in the best interest of Rio Tinto under the Chief Technologist role as geosequestration enables long-term profitability for this company.
- There is a clear conflict of interest between Dr Batterham’s dual positions. This conflict is reflected in the current government’s policies and positioning, which are strongly biased toward outcomes that are favourable to Rio Tinto.
- Geosequestration may play a role in the abatement strategy to combat global warming, but this should not be at the expense and/or deferment of energy efficiency and renewable technologies. Geosequestration should be one of a broad range of options that need to be incorporated into a wider policy framework for climate change and energy issues.

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<sup>1</sup> MacGill, I, Outhred, H, and Passey, R. 2003. The Australian Electricity Industry and Climate Change: What role for geosequestration? ERGO Draft Discussion Paper 0503. Electricity Restructuring Group. University of NSW. Sited May 2004 at <http://www.ergo.ee.unsw.edu.au/>

<sup>2</sup> WWF International. WWF position paper carbon capture and storage from fossil fuels. For a copy, contact A. Reynolds.

<sup>3</sup> Hawkins, D. 2004. Passing Gas: Thinking About Leakage from Geologic Carbon Storage Sites. Natural Resources Defence Council.

<sup>4</sup> MacGill, I, Outhred, H, and Passey, R. 2003. The Australian Electricity Industry and Climate Change: What role for geosequestration? ERGO Draft Discussion Paper 0503. Electricity Restructuring Group. University of NSW. Sited May 2004 at <http://www.ergo.ee.unsw.edu.au/>