

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist

Submission no: 6

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Submitter: Dr Geoff Garrett

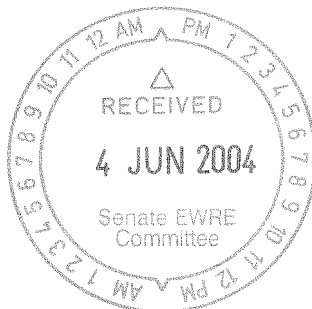
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3 June 2004

The Secretary
Employment, Workplace Relations and
Education References Committee
The Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

**RE: SJ#14417 Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References
Committee Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist**

I am aware of the Committee's call for public submissions to inform its deliberations in regard to this inquiry. In the context of the published terms of reference I would like – in my personal capacity – to make the following observations.

a). I consider that the Chief Scientist, well supported by his office in the Department of Education, Science and Training, has provided – and continues to provide – a valuable service to the Australian community in raising awareness of critical science and innovation issues, by promoting considered discussion of emerging issues and possible new directions, and through the effective encouragement and facilitation of collaboration across key players in our National Innovation System. In my view the Chief Scientist and his office are instrumental in ensuring the effective functioning and appropriate influence of the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) and its Standing Committee and Working Groups. The Chief Scientist plays a very important role in providing general guidance to the Working Groups while respecting their independence to draw conclusions and make recommendations as they see fit.

b). There is no doubt in my mind that the Chief Scientist's strong industry connections are very valuable as he brings a broad and well-informed perspective to his role, appropriately and admirably reflecting both his extensive public and private sector experience. I am aware of some suggestions that the Chief Scientist's 'part-time position' has the potential for conflict of interest issues to arise. Many people, in a relatively modest-sized scientific and technological community wear several 'hats' – the important thing is to manage any potential conflicts which may so emerge, which I believe Dr Batterham has done with diligence. Thus, in all my dealings with the Chief Scientist since my arrival in Australia more than three years ago I have not seen or perceived him to be influenced by any conflict of interest. Indeed, from my personal experience and exposure I believe that the Chief Scientist has been and is careful to avoid any such situation. I believe him to be a person of the highest integrity.

c). I see little advantage, currently, in the suggestion that the Chief Scientist be appointed through legislation. Given the Chief Scientist's advisory role this would not seem necessary or appropriate and may in fact work against attracting the best possible candidates in the future.

In summary, I strongly support the present arrangements under which the Chief Scientist works, admire his contribution and energy in the prosecution of his tasks and have full confidence in Dr Robin Batterham in that role.

Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Geoff Garrett', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr G G Garrett FTSE