

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

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

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Chairman

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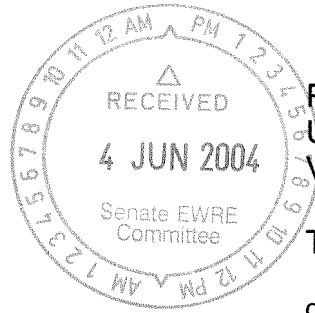
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The Secretary  
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and  
Education References Committee  
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### Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist

I am making a submission to the Inquiry in my capacity as Chairman of the Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Committee. I am also a member of the Industry Research and Development (IR&D) Board and a Councillor of Questacon, the National Science and Technology Centre. I have had contact with Dr Robin Batterham, the Chief Scientist, and the Office of the Chief Scientist in all of these capacities. Indeed, Dr Batterham is a member of the CRC Committee. I am also a member of the Coordinating Committee for Science and Technology (CCST) which is chaired by the Chief Scientist.

I should like the Inquiry to take into consideration the following points:

#### The functioning of the Office of the Chief Scientist

- Depending on circumstances, and need, there can be good reasons for having the position of Chief Scientist either full-time or part-time. It is important to have the flexibility to have either type of appointment to meet the needs of the Minister concerned and to get the services of the best person for the position. A part-time appointment allows for a person who is currently active in research, commerce and/or industry thus allowing for a person with an understanding of contemporary needs and the market place.
- A full-time appointee could become remote from the needs of the scientific community through not having day to day contact with the scientific community at large.
- The position depends on the expertise, availability and capacity of the person appointed to the position rather than any particular time commitment. In the case of a part-time appointee the person concerned could well be as productive as a full-time appointee. I believe Dr Batterham has proved this point through the enormous contribution that he has made as Chief Scientist.
- The Inquiry must ask the question of whether Dr Batterham could have done a better job if he had been working full-time. I have seen Dr Batterham's performance and I doubt this very much. He has certainly shown that he has the capacity to meet the needs of the position. Even though he has been part-time he has put in an enormous time commitment into the position.

- There is nothing known to me that could be held against Dr Batterham having accepted appointment to the position of Chief Scientist on a part-time basis. He has always been available, he has put in an extraordinary effort into the position, he has been extremely productive, and he has made an enormous contribution to the nation.

#### Potential conflicts of interest arising from the dual role of the Chief Scientist

- It would be possible for the Chief Scientist to have conflicts of interest (Col) whether working full-time or part-time. Col can depend on current and past employment, investments, family relationships, etc. Col does not only depend on employment status.
- The key issue related to Col is the declaration of Col where it exists and whether such Col is deemed material or immaterial. The government committees where I am involved operate under Col guidelines and detailed Col records are held by the relevant departments. Col is an agenda item when relevant. When necessary Probity Auditors are present at key committees and are always available for advice.
- Dr Batterham has been appointed to the CRC Committee in an individual capacity for the personal contribution he can make. The Committee is extremely pleased to have a member who is also the Chief Scientist as it can draw on his wider experience and receive advice on a wide range of matters related to science, technology and innovation.
- The CRC Committee has considered the issue of Col in relation to Dr Batterham's membership of the committee and his role of Chief Scientist. It has been determined that the "firewall" arrangement, as certified by Rio Tinto, is appropriate for managing Col for Dr Batterham. The committee has deemed that it is essential to use Dr Batterham's advice in the fullest way possible.
- Similar "firewall" arrangements have been put in place when CRC Committee members hold key government positions, for example a department Deputy Secretary; when members have held executive and/or Board appointments in CSIRO; and when members have held executive positions in government agencies such as the Australian Research Council.
- It is still possible for a "firewall" member to have a material Col depending on circumstances when the Col is outside and beyond the firewall.

#### The development of criteria for the appointment of the Chief Scientist through legislation

- It is important to maintain flexibility within the appointment to the position of Chief Scientist. As indicated above the appointment must meet the needs of the Minister at the time and allow for the appointment of the best person for the position. Legislation might remove the possibility for flexibility.
- There should be value for the taxpayer. Legislation could lead to an expensive bureaucracy which would require increased funding compared to the current situation.

The Senate Inquiry will be governed by the terms of reference set by the Senate. However I am certain that the Committee will learn during its discussions about the outstanding performance of Dr Batterham in the demanding role of Chief Scientist. His leadership and advice to government has led to the best position Australia has ever been in science, technology and innovation. All areas of research have benefitted through his advice. Australia's triple bottom line has improved leading to increased employment, increased exports, economic growth and an increased attention to social and environmental issues. In getting the job done it has been my observation that Dr Batterham has followed all government guidelines and procedures.

I would be very happy to provide the Inquiry with further information on request and if necessary appear before the Committee.

Yours Sincerely,

(Note: An original signed letter has been sent to the Inquiry by post)

Dr G N Vaughan