

MEDIA RELEASE

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FASTS Welcomes Proposed Research Charter

The peak body representing 60,000 scientists welcomes Minister Carr's proposal to create a charter for public research agencies to ensure the independence of science and research. (1)

The President of FASTS, Professor Ken Baldwin, said it is critical that there be a clear statement of the rights and obligations of scientists and researchers in organisations like CSIRO.

"The relations between Government, politics, public opinion, science and research are increasingly complex and important".

"It is inconceivable that there can be sensible policy on climate change, water use, bio-security, obesity or ageing without the input and open discussion of good science."

"While Governments must have final responsibility for policy on issues such as climate change, it is dangerous for democracy if researchers and institutions like universities, CSIRO and the Australian Research Council (ARC) are constrained by overt or implied political threats to the effective communication of the science."

"A critical element of Senator Carr's proposal is the idea that scientists and researchers not only have rights but also obligations to participate in policy debate".

"This expectation that science and research operate more effectively in the public domain comes at a time when there are growing expectations around the world that the results of publicly funded science and research should be freely available".

"On the 26th of December, 2007, President Bush signed legislation that mandates that all research funded by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) must be made publicly accessible by lodging all publications with an open access (free) on-line journal. This is the first time such a requirement has been legislated anywhere in the world.

"The idea that publicly funded scientists and researchers have rights and obligations to participate in public debates also has profound implications for science education and research training".

"It says graduates need a wide range of skills and capabilities that will enable them to fully participate in public debate. Such expectations inevitably raise really important issues about the quality and funding of education and universities, concluded Professor Baldwin.

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