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In July 2002 Dr Max Whitten, former Chief of CSIRO Entomology, published a scathing attack on CSIRO's leadership in *Australasian Science* (p.16). Since then our ongoing coverage of the "crisis" under CSIRO's Chief Executive, Dr Geoff Garrett, has been cheered from the sidelines by CSIRO staff but our reports only fleetingly pushed the issue into the wider public domain.

But momentum is building since the resignation letter of Norman Abjørensen as CSIRO's Manager of Communications was leaked to *Australasian Science* (AS, March 2005, pp.30–31). Abjørensen's letter questioned CSIRO management's decision last May to blackball *Australasian Science*, and this issue triggered intense questioning of Garrett by Labor Senator Kim Carr in a Senate Estimates hearing, an investigation into CSIRO's censorship by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and reports in several daily newspapers.

This month Abjørensen describes CSIRO's management malaise in an exclusive article published in *Australasian Science* (pp.39–42) that confirms the criticisms we have raised since Whitten's article was published, particularly those levelled at Communications Director Donna Staunton, the former tobacco lawyer and lobbyist who told a parliamentary enquiry in 1995 that smoking is not addictive (AS, April 2004, pp.37–38). Staunton assumed the role on a temporary contract on 7 April 2003 and was appointed to staff on 1 March 2004, yet throughout those 2 years she has hidden from public view.

Abjørensen says this is "extraordinary for a communications director," but explains that Staunton is so compromised by her tobacco industry past that she "will not appear where she might be questioned". This includes withdrawing her acceptance to attend a recent conference of science communicators at which her own staff would have comprised a significant proportion of delegate numbers. Little wonder then that Staunton, who "loathes the media," has ignored all requests for an interview with *Australasian Science*.

Abjørensen describes a media strategy that can only damage the credibility of the nation's premier research agency. Media releases are either "punterised" to make them "sexy" for the Prime Minister's favourite tabloid newspaper, or rewritten by business managers to talk up deals with corporate interests "seeking token involvement with CSIRO in order to use its name". There are even allegations that CSIRO staff were sent to a Senate Estimates hearing to "eyeball and intimidate" reporters who had written unfavourable articles.

Abjørensen's description of life inside CSIRO's Limestone Castle evokes images of Orwell's Ministry of Truth. According to Abjørensen: "Garrett appears to trust very few people, and this suspicion has spread throughout the organisation. People are careful about what they discuss, and with whom, as conversations are often reported back to managers." Rather than being an organisation built on cooperation and knowledge generation, the current regime has fostered "an environment where winks and nods prevail".

This is simply not good enough for an organisation that the public turns to as a trustworthy authority of scientific fact.

ABOUT THE COVER

This placoderm fish (*Compagopiscis*) shows the first true teeth of any vertebrate. Many of our body parts can be traced back to the Devonian period 417–354 million years ago. On page 18 John Long describes how our bones, ears, jaws, teeth, limbs, heart and lungs have their evolutionary origin in Devonian fish.



Kristine Brimmell, WA Museum