

# Australasian Science

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Regular readers of *Australasian Science* will be aware of the stand-off between CSIRO's executive and this magazine since we published an article that criticised the appointment of former tobacco lobbyist Donna Staunton as CSIRO's Director of Communications (*AS*, April 2004, pp.37–38). In reality, the stand-off goes back further to an interview in August 2002, when CSIRO's Chief Executive, Dr Geoff Garrett, refused to answer the questions of senior correspondent Dr Peter Pockley unless they were provided by email (*AS*, October 2002, p.45).

In the ensuing months the answers to many of these questions were not forthcoming, marking a pattern of evasion that came to a head in May 2004 when Garrett and his Deputy, Dr Ron Sandland, conceded that they were not going to respond to our uncomfortable lines of questioning (*AS*, July 2004, pp.44–45). Their decision to formally "blackball" *Australasian Science* gained the lasting attention of journalists and the Senate, with the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance giving CSIRO a special commendation in this year's Orwell Awards for violations of press freedoms (*AS*, July 2005, p.4).

Garrett has been under pressure to end the impasse, and this month we publish an interview with him and Sandland (see pp.39–42).

Staunton, too, has sought a meeting but has not specified an agenda. While *Australasian Science* insisted on 4 April that any meeting should be for a formal interview, yet again no agreement has been reached as we go to press.

In the 2 years that Staunton has served in her communications role with CSIRO – first as a consultant and now as a staffer – she has refused to be interviewed. This is not good enough given her communications responsibilities.

Staunton's mediaphobia now also extends to CSIRO staff. CSIRO's Policy on Public Comment, tabled in Senate Estimates in June, directs all staff to seek permission from Staunton's Communications Unit before commenting to the media. This may be an appropriate policy for the tobacco industry but it is antithesis to the standards of open scientific enquiry. It also ensures that CSIRO loses its place in public debate about scientific issues.

Already the policy has dealt some double-standards. It requires any comment made by staff in a private capacity to state that it is a personal view. This is exactly what Dr Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe did when he criticised the research directions of CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, where he was an unpaid honorary research fellow, at a book launch on 4 May (*AS*, June 2005, p.4). Despite following the policy his division's Chief issued him with an ultimatum. He departed on 1 July.

The policy also prohibits staff from using CSIRO stationery to express a private opinion that may give the impression that the comments were authorised by CSIRO. Yet in 2000, when Staunton was an employee at AMP, she used AMP letterhead and her title as an executive in a private letter distancing herself from her well-documented claims as Director of the Tobacco Institute of Australia that nicotine is not addictive (*AS*, July 2004, pp.12, 44). It would be interesting to see how Staunton would respond to questions about this double-standard, but first she'd need to permit herself to be interviewed.

## ABOUT THE COVER

New research has found that people lying down can solve anagrams faster than people standing up. However, the same is not true for mathematical problems. Anagrams are known as insight puzzles, and the research indicates that you are more likely to have a "Eureka" moment while lying down (see p.14).

