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EDITOR/PUBLISHER: Guy Nolch

CONSCIENCE EDITOR: Peter Pockley

WRITERS: Stephen Luntz, Peter Pockley,
Simon Grose

CARTOONIST: Simon Kneebone

PATRONS: Laureate Professor Peter Doherty,
Robyn Williams

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Wattleree Rd PO, VIC 3145, Australia
Phone (03) 9500 0015
Fax (03) 9500 0255
E-mail science@control.com.au
Web www.control.com.au

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The resumption by CSIRO's management of "dialogue" with *Australasian Science* through an interview granted by Drs Geoff Garrett and Ron Sandland (*AS*, August 2005, pp.39–42) is a welcome start, but CSIRO's leaders have yet to become adequately open and transparent with staff and taxpayers.

Garrett revealed last month that he planned to privatise a joint venture in forestry science with a New Zealand government-owned company under the meaningless monicker of "ensis" (*AS*, August 2005, p.13). The revelation drew fire from CSIRO staff, forcing Garrett to claim he had been "inaccurate" in his choice of words (see p.13 in this issue).

But Garrett's gaffe was no simple slip of the tongue. He consistently used key words characterising a commercial venture, such as "company", "shares", "owner", "Board of Directors", "business", "earnings" and "reinvestment". He didn't mention anything about research from the subsumed CSIRO division.

AS: What about the research and income-earning activities that is planned for this joint outfit? **GG:** I think over time that will be evolved. In all probability it's slightly in excess of 50% of its revenue generated from external sources. I can get you the actual numbers. **AS:** Will it retain its earnings or is that going to be shared between CSIRO and the NZ outfit? **GG:** That's one of the options that we have to look at ... My view is that those earnings should be reinvested to grow the business, but as an owner of that business.

In a confidential memo to staff about changes on 22 June, Dr Rick Ede mentioned "research" once in passing and announced his title as "Executive Director, Ensis Investment".

Australasian Science has copied the recording of the hour-long interview to CSIRO Chairman, Catherine Livingstone, requesting circulation to Board members. To demonstrate the openness Garrett espoused in the interview, we have challenged him to enable unrestricted access to the audio file on CSIRO's website.

The ban that Garrett and 20 "CSIRO communicators" widely publicised on 12 July 2004 (*AS*, August 2004, pp.1,45) has yet to be publicly lifted and there is continued silence from the Director of Communications, Donna Staunton, about being interviewed on her responsibilities.

However, the most effective challenge to Garrett's reorganisation will arise from the financial consequences. There are indications that 2004–05 will show a continuing shortfall of his projections for large increases in "external income". Figures he supplied to *Australasian Science* demonstrate total external revenue dropped from \$325.5 million in 2001–02 to \$319.9 million in 2003–04 (without correcting for inflation) while Business Development & Commercialisation staff rose from 153 to 195 at cost of \$33 million in 2003–04.

This is a dismal result that falls well short of projections made on the public record. The figures add further evidence that the national research organisation is reinventing itself as a low-rent corporate consultancy.

ABOUT THE COVER

Computer artwork of a human embryo about to implant on the wall of the uterus. Understanding the chemical messages that prevent a fertilised embryo from attaching to the uterus could lead to new therapies for miscarriage and infertility, and conversely to new non-hormonal methods of contraception (see p.14).



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