



Peacock's Dual Powers

Dr Jim Peacock has become Australia's most influential scientist, and not just because of his recent appointment as the government's Chief Scientist. Peter Pockley reports entirely from exclusive documents gathered from government, CSIRO and leaks that Peacock now leads a new "team" at the apex of CSIRO, where he is charged with restoring the agency's fortunes – politically, financially and publicly.

Dr Jim Peacock has dual posts that are unique in Australian scientific history but open issues of independence and conflicts of responsibilities. While initial reporting in the mainstream media has covered a few aspects of his role as Chief Scientist, his parallel responsibilities in CSIRO were largely suppressed, even from CSIRO staff.

In filling some gaps, *Australasian Science* has found significant anomalies between the two posts. While the government has been open, the taxpayer-funded science agency has been notably protective of equivalent information.

Dual Roles

After Dr Robin Batterham resigned as part-time Chief Scientist in May 2005, the government advertised the post with a revised job description. According to Senate Estimates (15

February), a headhunter was engaged to attract applications and sift around 30 candidates. An appointment committee gave a short list to Science Minister, Dr Brendan Nelson, who recommended one name to Cabinet, only to have it rejected.

After reconsideration by the committee, Cabinet appointed Peacock from 1 March. Peacock's term as Chief Scientist is for 2 years until 28 February 2008. This will be 2 months after he turns 70.

In contrast, Peacock's new CSIRO post was not advertised internally or externally but Chief Executive Dr Geoff Garrett engaged him directly as a CSIRO Fellow with the "full support of the Board". Garrett announced in an email to the 44-member Executive Management Council (EMC) on 9 March: "Jim will lead... a small team in the Office of the Chief Executive". Garrett did not state Peacock's term in

the CSIRO team, nor for the other members of his team: Dr Tony Haymet and Dr Attila Brungs.

As Chief Scientist, Peacock is engaged "for an average of 3 days per week" (Batterham worked 2 days), while Garrett says that Peacock will operate within CSIRO "for approximately half of his time". His working week is thus, officially, 5.5 days.

The Chief Scientist's office says that he receives \$154,140 per annum "on a consultancy basis... determined by the Remuneration Tribunal". The office has "10 DEST staff and a budget of ~\$1.2 million in 2005-06". His first major task for the new Science Minister, Julie Bishop, is to chair the Research Quality Framework Development Advisory Group.

CSIRO, however, is coy. A spokesperson told *Australasian Science*: "We don't reveal salary details of our staff".

However, an email sent by Garrett to CSIRO Plant Industry staff on 1 August 2001 outlined Peacock's engagement as a CSIRO Fellow from December 2003 until December 2005. The official salary for CSIRO Fellows is \$150,367-169,404 full-time. Peacock also receives superannuation from 38 years as a member of CSIRO's staff.

If he is now on a contract, CSIRO is obliged to declare its value. The support staff and budget for Peacock's "team" is unknown.

Peacock Leads CSIRO's "Science Initiatives"

Announcing Peacock as Chief Scientist on 28 February, Bishop said: "Dr Peacock will continue, part-time, in his role as a senior researcher in CSIRO". Asked for details of his CSIRO role, a spokesperson answered generally: "He is leading key science initiatives across CSIRO. Working with the Chief Executive, Jim Peacock has been involved with such activities as Divisional Science Reviews, the new Science Investment Process and the appoint-

ment of leading mid-career scientists to CSIRO divisions. Also, he is continuing his research.”

But Peacock's current status will make it hard for him to do any research. *Australasian Science* has learned that Peacock holds CSIRO's second most powerful post with executive responsibilities that will raise questions about which hat he is wearing whenever he writes or says anything.

CSIRO's Board has approved the changes, which seem designed to underpin Garrett in areas of manifest failures, internal disquiet and public controversy. *Australasian Science* has chronicled these issues since 2002 and they had recent prominence in mainstream media.

Garrett began his email on 9 March by restricting its circulation, saying: "This email is not intended for distribution beyond EMC. As and if the need arises we will inform staff more generally, e.g. through Monday Mail".

Weeks later, Garrett had not revealed the changes directly to 6000-odd staff, implying that he lacks confidence in their reactions.

The big change is the establishment of a "Kitchen Cabinet" of three, sitting in Garrett's office and inserting a powerful new layer of "management" between Garrett and his "Executive Team" (ET) of 11 members. Probably initiated by the Board, Peacock has executive duties that far exceed his earlier post-retirement role as a kind of mentor to upcoming "leaders" in CSIRO.

Haymet had earlier been seconded to direct the Science into Policy Team and CSIRO International from, substantively, Chief of Marine & Atmospheric Research in Hobart. A theoretical chemist, he has a substantial record of research on water as it freezes and how Antarctic fish convert it into an anti-freeze protein that remains liquid below 0°C.

Brungs, a former Rhodes Scholar, is also a chemistry PhD who added

management training to his armoury. He finalised the Science Investment Process (SIP), which includes controversial cuts to renewable energy research and boosts to fossil fuel research, as dictated by government priorities.

Succession Indicators

Garrett told managers that the "Strategic Plan" includes "an increased focus on Business Development" with more external earnings, a thrust that manifestly failed under Merhdad Baghai, a management whiz kid on whose branch Garrett showered a fortune in staffing and expenses but reaped barely static earnings. Baghai resigned mid-2005.

Other changes include Dr Rod Hill leaving Group Executive: Information, Manufacturing and Minerals to become Executive Director: Business Development. A known critic of Baghai, Hill is under pressure to lift earnings. He takes CSIRO's key Marketing Team from Communications.

Dr Ron Sandland, the dutiful Deputy Chief Executive, got passing mention from Garrett: "Ron will continue as ET steward for the SIP process", presumably because he will be gone soon, which Garrett did not announce. However, in an email on 10 March leaked to *Australasian Science*, Dr Cliff Mallett, Acting Chief of Exploration & Mining, told his senior staff, probably without authority: "Geoff has previously indicated that Ron Sandland reaches retirement age mid year".

As Peacock is 68, this positions Haymet (50) and Hill (57) as potential internal successors to Garrett, whose second term ends in December 2008.

However, double-speak still characterised CSIRO's "communications" as the spokesperson maintained to *Australasian Science* that Haymet was returning to his Hobart post in July, and did not mention his already-settled superior role.

Staunton Diminished

A big loser, not mentioned in Garrett's email, is Donna Staunton, Executive Director of Communications. Garrett's email announced that Peacock's "team will assume responsibility for science-focused communication related activities – which play well to the strengths, passions and objectives of this team as science advocates – specifically, Science Education and Outreach and the Discovery Centre".

This could fill a glaring gap in CSIRO. Garrett has never shone as a communicator of science – only of organisational change for its own sake. It is not obvious, though, that the management triumvirate will find opportunities to fill this gap.

A blow to Staunton's standing is the loss of Internet Marketing Manager, Adrian Motherway, who takes the "content area" of the new CSIRO web site to Hill on 1 July, according to an email from Yana del Valle, Internet Delivery Manager. Supervised by Staunton, the web site generated political controversy last year for its excessive cost (~\$10 million) and repeated delays in launching it.

In telling her senior staff of two changes, Staunton did not mention the loss of the Marketing team, blandly declaring in an email on 9 March: "Given that my decks have been cleared a little, I will be concentrating much more on strategic communications for the Organisation, Flagship Communications and the upcoming Triennium Funding bid". Of the nine duties allocated to Staunton on CSIRO's intranet, which were used to justify her enormous salary of more than \$300,000, she now has only six.

As she has presided over the worst media in CSIRO's history, including about her controversial appointment, what she means by "strategic communications" remains to be demonstrated.

Full documents informing this report are available at australasianscience.com.au