

New CSIRO Chief Faces Juggling Act

It has long been flagged that the Chief Executive of CSIRO, Dr Geoff Garrett, would not be seeking an extension to his controversial 8-year reign, which expires on 31 January.

The search for a successor has been on in earnest, and on 3 September the Science Minister, Senator Kim Carr, announced that Garrett would be succeeded by Dr Megan Clark (see p.13), who is currently Vice-President of Health, Safety, Environment, Community and Sustainability at BHP Billiton. Clark is also on the Advisory Board of the Ian Wark Research Institute for Particle Science, St Vincent's Hospital Foundation Board and the National Innovation Review Panel.

Her profile on CSIRO's website says she "began her career as a mine geologist and subsequently worked in mineral exploration, mine geology, R&D management, venture capital and technical strategy areas with WMC Resources over a 15-year period."

According to Carr: "Her vast leadership experience in the development and application of science and technology in a business environment will be an invaluable asset for the CSIRO and for the nation".

Clark is the first female to take on the role, and will join CSIRO after a period of intense restructuring under Garrett, during which funding of the organisation fell in real terms, along with staff morale.

Garrett's legacy is the formation of "Flagships" designed to bring expertise from across CSIRO to collaborate on broad research areas. However, internal funding of Flagships was at the expense of the existing CSIRO divisions, which have been forced to make cuts to long-standing research programs.

Furthermore, there has been much angst over an increasing shift towards commercially lucrative contract research at the expense of basic "blue sky" research, calling into question CSIRO's core function: research for the long-term good of the Australian public or for the industry partners now paying for targeted research outcomes.

Moreover, the need to "service" industry partners and to manage and protect intellectual property has seen the ranks of managers and lawyers at CSIRO swell at the expense of its scientists.

Yet another distraction is CSIRO's major stakeholder, the government, which during the Howard era led to



Cover Story

The skull of *Protemnodon anak*, a giant browsing kangaroo that weighed up to 150 kg. New evidence reveals that Tasmania's megafauna survived until soon after a land bridge across Bass Strait enabled humans to cross from the mainland (see p.14), providing further evidence that humans rather than climate brought about the demise of Australia's megafauna.

Photo: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery

claims of censorship when scientists commenting on global warming fell foul of a government in determined denial of the need to reduce emissions. While Carr has promised to establish a charter for free scientific debate, this has yet to see the light of day.

Clark begins her 5-year term in January, and faces quite a juggling act to manage the expectations of the government, industry, scientists and public while creating her own legacy for Australia's premier scientific research organisation.

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