



Terms of Reference

Prime Minister's Science Advisory Committee

Background

The Prime Minister has established a Science Advisory Committee to provide independent scientific advice to the Government and to comment on and contribute to scientific issues and debates of public importance.

The Science Advisory Committee is a Ministerial Advisory Committee of one, accountable to the Prime Minister. The sole member of the Committee is the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor (PMCSA).

Appointments to the Science Advisory Committee are generally for a term of three years, but may come to an end earlier by notice from either party.

The Committee will be referred to as the PMCSA in this document.

Role of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

The role of the PMCSA is to provide high quality, independent, scientific advice to the Prime Minister and the Government on matters agreed between the Prime Minister and the PMCSA from time to time; and may also include:

- promoting the understanding of science by the public, policy makers and elected officials, including clarification of issues of public concern and assisting in the understanding of where science can benefit New Zealand;
- undertaking activities that enhance the use of science and evidence in policy formation and evaluation across government;
- undertaking a representational role from time to time, at the Prime Minister's request, and assisting in promoting New Zealand's interests internationally through science;
- undertaking activities that promote science and technology education;
- commenting on science issues (while observing the "no surprises" principle);
- undertaking specialist research on specific topics on which the Prime Minister has requested advice or commissioned reports;
- undertaking any other tasks or functions as agreed between the Prime Minister and the CSA from time to time; and
- focussing on issues and opportunities where science has the greatest potential to address issues faced by Maori and Pacific communities.

Public statements

“No surprises” principle applies

The PMCSA will observe the “no surprises” convention in regard to all public statements on science, whether the proposed statement is made in the capacity of the PMCSA or as a private citizen. The PMCSA will give advance notice to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister’s Office of the intention to make any public statement (even where the statement relates to the PMCSA’s acknowledged area of expertise), and will provide a copy of the full content of the statement and any supporting information.

The Government and Ministers are free to accept, reject or disagree publicly with any advice from, or public statement made by, the PMCSA.

Conflicts of interest

It is important that the PMCSA retains public confidence and the confidence of the Prime Minister in their ability to provide independent advice. The PMCSA should avoid any situations that might (or might be perceived to) compromise their integrity or otherwise lead to a conflict of interest. In particular:

- competitive research funding would be seen as compromising independence during the term of the PMCSA’s appointment;
- appointments to any other committees during the PMCSA’s term of appointment should be carefully considered. The PMCSA should seek advice from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) and should not accept appointments where there is any risk of a conflict or perceived conflict of interest.

Working arrangements

Work programme and requests for advice

The PMCSA may propose matters for inclusion in the work programme. The work programme is to be agreed between the Prime Minister and the PMCSA and prioritised within the available budget.

The PMCSA’s work programme will be publicly available.

From time to time, other Ministers may make requests to the PMCSA for advice, via the Prime Minister. The PMCSA will work with the relevant Minister to clarify the scope of the advice, which will be approved by the Prime Minister. The PMCSA will decide the priority for that advice in consultation with the Prime Minister. The PMCSA may decline to provide advice where it has not been requested by the Prime Minister. Other Ministers who wish to commission advice from the PMCSA must also provide funding for that advice.

The PMCSA may consult and work with other bodies, for example the Royal Society.

Reporting requirements

The PMCSA will report annually to DPMC on the work programme and expenditure.

DPMC is administering department

DPMC will be the administering department for the PMCSA and will enter into any necessary contracts on the PMCSA’s behalf.

The PMCSA may choose to adopt any of DPMC's corporate policies, as applicable.

Relationship with the Departmental Science Advisors

The PMCSA may convene meetings of the Departmental Science Advisors forum (and others, as appropriate) in order to discuss work programmes and build consensus on scientific issues.

Financial support

Financial support for the PMCSA including an honorarium will be provided by DPMC and other agencies in accordance with Cabinet decisions.

Budgets and other aspects of financial management will be as agreed between DPMC and the PMCSA (and the PMCSA's host institution, as appropriate).

Official Information Act and Public Records Act

The Official Information Act 1982

Advice provided by the PMCSA to the Prime Minister and Government is subject to the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), and will also be considered for proactive release where appropriate. DPMC will process and manage (on behalf of the Prime Minister) any requests for official information received relating to advice from the PMCSA as required.

Information held by the PMCSA is also subject to the OIA (see s 2(2)).

Public Records Act 2005

The PMCSA is subject to the Public Records Act 2005 and will comply with the relevant obligations under that Act.

Publication of reports

Reports published by the PMCSA will be made available on the PMCSA's website. Where possible, this will include reports or links to reports by any previous appointees to the role. All web activity will comply with government web standards.