



**OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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**Media Release**

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**Advancing New Zealand through better use of evidence in policy formation**

New Zealand could do better in applying research-based evidence to policy formation and evaluation, says Sir Peter Gluckman, the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, in releasing a discussion paper today that suggests a number of ways in which government agencies could improve the impact of the scientific advice they offer. Currently, knowledge and evidence are connected to the policy process in a somewhat inconsistent manner and protocols should be developed to ensure that scientific advice meets high standards of quality and integrity, thereby advancing the public good.

A confounder is that the nature of science itself has changed. Science increasingly deals with complex processes such as climate change, said Sir Peter, where certainty cannot be possible and answers are defined in terms of probabilities and risk. Such uncertainty is not what policy makers want to hear, but they must act while also taking into account other dimensions such as community values, public opinion, affordability and diplomatic considerations.

Providers of scientific advice must understand this interface between knowledge derived from the scientific process and the values of an increasingly informed and involved society. This complexity requires expert advisers to be more sophisticated in the way that they communicate with policy makers and the public, for example by being explicit about the assumptions, limitations and uncertainties underlying the evidence and by presenting technological options in ways that allow the full range of their possible benefits or adverse effects to be appreciated.

Commenting particularly on the area of social intervention, Sir Peter said that many programmes have been introduced and are continued without independent evaluation of how well they work or their value for money. Formal analysis of proposed and existing programmes for impact and cost-effectiveness should be considered as routine, he commented, providing objective evidence for public engagement in decisions on whether to expand, continue or terminate them.

The discussion paper *Towards better use of evidence in policy formation* is the result of a 12-month consultation with ministries and agencies in New Zealand and with science policy officials in several jurisdictions overseas.

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