

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the Office of the Chief Scientist

Submission no: 17

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Senate Enquiry into:

Functioning of the Office of the Chief Scientist and, in particular, potential conflicts of interest which may arise when appointees to the position of Chief Scientist act in a part-time capacity.

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The following comments are made drawing from extensive interactions with the Office of Chief Scientist over many years.

1. The Chief Scientist plays an essential role in raising the profile of science within government and in the community at large and in promoting awareness of the returns from investment in research and development. Hence
 - experience in various sectors is beneficial
 - having the opportunity to keep abreast of international developments in the public and private sectors is advantageous
 - a passion for science and its application is essential

There would appear to be no necessity for a full-time Chief Scientist if the individual has the ability, the energy and commitment to fulfil the Chief Scientist's role in addition to any other commitments. The individual should be judged on the outcomes.

2. The Chief Scientist, while developing ideas and positions on issues of importance, based on their extensive networks, must be able to listen to and vary their own position if other views are shown to have weight.

3. The Chief Scientist should not be a captive of any party or have vested interests. All of us wear several hats and understanding which hat an individual is wearing at a particular point in time and being true to that position is the critical issue.

I have personally found all of our Chief Scientists to date, whether full time or part time, to have these properties.

In particular, I simply state that I have had reason to interact with the present Chief Scientist on matters relevant to his public and private roles. In my experience if there was even the slightest chance that engagement, even in discussion, with him in his private sector role, could be construed as conflicting with his role as Chief Scientist he has declined involvement.