



Chief Scientist

MEDIA RELEASE

PROFESSOR PENNY D SACKETT

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: PMSEIC FINDING SOLUTIONS TO AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE CHALLENGES

The Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) met today to discuss how innovation, science and research can contribute to ensuring Australia is prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future, which will involve new approaches to knowledge generation, health, sustainability, and economic and social development.

Established in 1989 as the Prime Minister's Science Council, PMSEIC brings together Australia's top scientific and business leaders to examine and make recommendations on science, engineering and innovation issues of national importance.

As Executive Officer of PMSEIC, Professor Penny Sackett, Chief Scientist for Australia, unveiled a new model for PMSEIC.

"The new model establishes more formal structures to provide long-term, over-the-horizon vision on all matters associated with science, engineering and innovation.

"This will ensure that the policy choices made today lead towards a sustainable, prosperous, healthy and educated Australian society in the future.

"Essentially the idea is to identify a set of plausible futures that lie 10 to 50 years ahead of us, draw a line between where we are now and each of those futures, and then ask: What are the problems and opportunities for Australia that intersect that line that involve science?

"If there are gaps in our current knowledge that prevent us from formulating good policy for those possible challenges and opportunities, we need to know what they are, and fill them," Professor Sackett said.

As the primary advisory body to the Prime Minister on matters of Science, Engineering and Innovation, it is vital that PMSEIC takes a long term view and engage in foresighting (over the horizon) activities.

"In order to stay competitive in a global world, Australia needs to take a long term, cross portfolio approach, as many of our international counterparts have been doing," Professor Sackett said.

Speaking on the new PMSEIC model, Professor Graeme Turner, Director, Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland and a PMSEIC member said that it was pleasing to note that the Council will be drawing on the nation's full range of expertise, including those of the humanities and social sciences.

“The explicit nomination of a foresighting process provides PMSEIC with a unique opportunity to provide long range advice on issues of national importance, highlighting areas of research where an early and timely response can really make a difference,” Professor Turner said.

Working under the new model, Standing Committee members of PMSEIC have been focusing on four foresighting clusters or themes:

- Climate Change, Energy, Water and Environment;
- Science as an Engine for Innovation in Commerce, Industry and the Arts;
- National Health, Well-being and Security;
- Knowledge Generation, Skills and Perception in a Global World;

“These themes lie at the intersection of Government portfolios and across traditional disciplines of research, Professor Sackett said.

“It will require a broad vision and cross-portfolio co-operation to arrive at the best choices. Even the themes themselves may change in the future as we adapt and respond to a changing global environment.

“Through an active exchange of views today, we anticipate that the Prime Minister and the Council will agree on priorities for further work, so that specialised teams of experts can be formed to research these priorities further and present their detailed findings at future PMSEIC meetings,” Professor Sackett said.

At today’s meeting, one such specialised Expert Working Group, comprised of key health researchers from Australia’s leading universities and research centres, presented a timely report to the Council on the challenges faced by Australia in the event of a global epidemic affecting humans or animals.

The report, *Epidemics in a Changing World*, highlights some potential ways Australia could enhance its capacity to combat epidemics.

“The Expert Working Group produced a comprehensive report in a very short time frame, especially considering they had the additional pressure of being called upon in a professional capacity to respond to the spread of the virus H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza),” Professor Sackett said.

Please refer to the [PMSEIC](#) website for further information on the Council and the Expert Working Group reports, including the *Epidemics in a Changing World*.

For more information on the Chief Scientist for Australia, Professor Penny Sackett, please visit to www.chiefscientist.gov.au.

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