

Tēnā koutou,

I have been in my role as Senior Communications Advisor with the Our Land and Water National Science Challenge for three-and-a-half years. I'd like to share some observations from my perspective as a science support worker on what has worked well in our somewhat experimental context as a mission-led science funder. I will end with a loose suggestion about a potential frame for a future research system structure.

#### **Research entity websites should be transparent and user-focused**

- It isn't necessary for future priority research missions to start from square one with their website development. The combined knowledge of the NSC comms leaders is worth probing when establishing a framework for future priority-based research missions – it would be a real shame to lose this knowledge.
- The websites of the NSCs are generally highly transparent. They list all funded research programmes, their aims and collaborators, and research outputs. This is not the case for some CRI and other research entity websites.
- In some cases the websites are being redeveloped for the final stages of the challenges to have a strong end-user focus. The OLW website refresh is in development. We have learned from the processes and experience of the [Deep South Challenge](#), which is an exemplar of an end-user-focused science website targeting a clear mission and calls to action. We are also inspired by the recent redesign of the [Sustainable Seas Challenge](#) website, which is an exemplar of making useable tools and resources the focus of the website.
- Initially the NSC websites were highly diverse. Over time, the NSC comms staff have collaborated, learned from each other and been inspired by innovative approaches. As we develop best practice for mission-led research websites for the NZ context, our websites have become more similar.

#### **Stakeholder engagement is more effective under a co-leadership approach**

- For all new research programmes since 2019, OLW has required that 4 co-leaders are appointed:
  - Science Lead – for obvious reasons
  - Te Ao Māori Lead – to ensure true partnership with Māori stakeholders and collaborators (role strongly supported by Māori leadership within OLW directorate)
  - Implementation Lead – to focus on delivery of impact, communications and engagement activities
  - Project Manager – to support effective collaboration, ensure timeliness of milestones and deliverables, communicate with funder (quarterly reporting)
- This has been a very effective approach and is just one example of research structure innovation that could be brought into 'best practice' recommendations from the NSCs for future mission-led/research priority funders.

#### **Communications and engagement should be tightly integrated with research impact**

- Research impact needs to be better funded and resourced, but this resource doesn't need to be from the science workforce while impact planning capacity is still low. In a refreshed science system focused on priorities, communications and engagement teams should be bigger and better resourced to support research impact, and to work directly with researchers.
- My observation is that although researchers want their work to have impact, they need significant support in understanding how to get there. IPEN is a good resource but is optional, whereas planning for impact should be a critical step for all mission-led/priority funded research programmes.

- OLW has developed and is testing an integrated Impact Planning Tool, streamlining resources from IPEN and the AgResearch Beyond Results platform. This 7-page document steps researchers through a process from programme logic, through stakeholder and collaborator identification, through to developing communications and engagement activities – ensuring these have a line of sight to impact.
- OLW is now embedding communication professionals in some large research programmes, to ensure that at all steps of the research end-users are considered, future outcome and impact goals are kept in focus, and outputs include plain language and end-user focused materials. In one programme, we have separately engaged and funded an ‘Impact Broker’ to communicate the work of the research team. We will know more about the success of these approaches in >2 years, but initial feedback is that the research teams appreciate the contribution of these non-scientist team members.

### **One idea for an overarching research structure**

- Could the four major components of Te Taiao guide a future structure for four major research entities? These could undertake fundamental and blue sky research, host data and would be long-term and stable institutions.
  - Whenua (soil and land)
  - Wai (freshwater bodies and their connections)
  - Āhuarangi (climate across time)
  - Koiora (all living communities: human, plant, animal) – I can imagine this may need to be further split into human wellbeing and biodiversity
- If you imagine the four parts of te Taiao as a Venn diagram, priority/mission-focused 'pop-up' institutions would target missions that sit in the intersections.
- It would be important for all research collaborations to include scientists from all four Te Taiao organisations, to be across trade-offs and co-benefits. For example, OLW sits in the intersection between Wai and Whenua, but also has important Koiora considerations in terms of the economic benefits of agriculture and impact of change on rural communities – however we are not mandated to consider future Āhuarangi impacts. It seems to me that it would be sensible for future priority missions to ensure there is a ‘voice of the climate’ (and of water, and land, and human health/biodiversity) involved at some level to boost the potential for finding co-benefits.
- This idea comes from the OLW mental model to guide our approach to research design, within the frame of Te Taiao ([defined in more detail here](#)). This has proven to be a really useful conceptual tool.

Ngā mihi,  
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