

Environment Southland's response to 'Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways Green Paper 2021'



Environment Southland would like to thank the Ministry for the opportunity to comment on 'Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways Green Paper' 2021. We believe the establishment of national research priorities, as well as appropriate funding arrangements and resourcing, are critical to the integrity of New Zealand's Research, Science and Innovation System (RSI).

Evidence based science is fundamental to Environment Southland and we welcome any proposed strengthening to the system.

We wish to add our support for the submission developed by Te Uru Kahika – the Regional and Unitary Authorities Aotearoa, while adding the following additional comments:

1 Ngā Whakaarotau Rangahau - Research Priorities

A national approach to science is critical, to provide the appropriate scaffolding to RSI. However, any national approach needs to be adaptive, allowing for regional and local differences. A combined national, regional and local approach operates more holistically than a one sized fits all, filling the gaps a national approach cannot provide for and reducing the risk of duplication of work that has already been completed, such as regional science strategies.

As a regional council, we support a national approach that offers appropriate guidance to local communities and therefore the development of national priorities must be both reflective of these local contexts. These place-based strategies have been developed within the local context; something that cannot be framed through a wholly national approach. Science through the lens of end-user involvement supports our 25-year outcomes as a region.

We support the role of future focused, solutions based science. For example, science has informed what we know about water quality in Southland. The next logical step is to use science to develop a solutions based approach to the issue of water quality. This requires a shift from "how bad" things are, to one of solutions and improvement.

2 Te Tiriti, mātauranga Māori me nga Wawata o te Māori – The Treaty, Mātauranga Māori and Māori Aspirations

Environment Southland agrees that mātauranga Māori is a Taonga and should be holistically embedded within the RSI system. However, we are concerned that regionally-based Māori knowledge hubs may be difficult to implement to support the aspirations of all Iwi/Hapu within Southland, without flexible nationally consistent Māori research methods and priorities.

With the scale of national reform across all sectors, there is a lack of resourcing being allocated to achieve an integrated Te Ao Māori approach. Stable, long-term funding and resourcing must be prioritised by all parties. Mātauranga Māori is more than co-governance and this should be reflected in the development of all strategies, policy and reform; from the outset, not as part of a general consultation process.

Resourcing that enables individual knowledge brokers, upskilling in Te Ao Māori and cultural health monitoring should be integrated into any reform. We welcome all opportunities for Māori to engage with and participate in the RSI system. To achieve the outcomes the Ministry is looking for, there must be proper representation of our diverse communities at the decision table.

3 Te Tuku Pūtea – Funding

We support a nationally consistent approach to RSI funding, that recognises the important role regional science plays to the national picture. State of the Environment monitoring for example, contributes to the national science framework but is currently funded in an ad-hoc fashion. This inhibits the ability for regional and local councils to attract and retain the best teams to work on critical issues across the sector. When funding is ad-hoc, retention of skilled staff is difficult and detracts from the goal of producing robust, evidence based science. This is not to say a new model should not be undertaken whereby the best teams are utilised across regions; rather to engage and support the development of future focused science, there needs to be a change in the way it is funded to ensure the right talent is available across New Zealand.

4 Te Hanganga Rangahau – Research Infrastructure

We support the need for nationally consistent methods and instrumentation. For example, there are four current methods for measuring the air contaminant PM₁₀, each rendering slightly different outcomes. We acknowledge that one consistent method of sampling runs the risk of creating a monopoly situation. However, we consider a fairer approach is to formally recognise the differences and seek to develop an agreed adjustment method to streamline these outcomes.

We note also that RSI reform may be disruptive to the sector. New Zealand is in the midst of responding to COVID-19, while also dealing with a range of complex environmental challenges, including climate change. We emphasise the need for the Ministry to be cognisant of the scale of change and take care to maintain a well-functioning RSI system during these times.