

Hon Penny Simmonds

Minister for the Environment
Minister for Tertiary Education and Skills
Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment



18 JUN 2024

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Rt Hon Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
Matthew.Paterson@pce.parliament.nz

Dear Rt Hon Simon Upton

Thank you for your letter of 17 May 2024 to Hon Simon Watts, Minister for Climate Change, Hon Tama Potaka, Minister of Conservation, and myself, outlining your concern that the National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research's (NIWA) job cuts could impact the environment portfolio. I am replying to you as the issues you raise fall within my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for the Environment.

Improving the use of data and evidence to deliver better environmental outcomes is a priority for this Government, so I welcome your recommendations in this area.

I acknowledge that the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) benefits from capability of Crown Research Institutes (CRIs), universities and the wider science system. Officials recently submitted to the Science System Advisory Group (SSAG) and University Advisory Group (UAG) on MfE's needs to carry out its core functions, including the importance of developing and maintaining access to such capability. I understand that suggestions for improvement in MfE's SSAG submission align with recommendations in your 2019-2022 reporting series on improving environmental data and research in New Zealand.

I support the need for Government's medium and long-term environmental research priorities to be reflected in CRI research. I am aware MfE officials are engaging with the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and Science NZ as well as individual CRIs on critical science capabilities, data, and monitoring networks. I will be regularly updated on progress.

Universities also play an important role in building and providing capability MfE requires. I am responsible for the UAG as part of my tertiary education and skills portfolio. The UAG will consider, among other things, the role of universities in addressing economic, environmental, and social challenges, as well as building a strong, diverse, and inclusive workforce. I would like to see central government and universities working more closely together to make the most of our capability to address these types of challenges.

Thank you for sharing your concerns and your ongoing work to improve New Zealand's environment.

Kind regards,



Hon Penny Simmonds
Minister for the Environment

cc. Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology,
Chairperson, NIWA Board (Barry Harris)