



28 February 2025

Rt Hon Dr Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
Te Kaitiaki Taio a te Whare Pāremata

Tēnā koe Dr Upton

Proposed restructuring of public research establishments

Thank you for your letter on 7 February 2025, regarding the placing of Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research in the new Bioeconomy Public Research Organisation.

This Government is focussed on driving economic growth for New Zealand, with the aim to see more science commercialised and applied to maximise the benefits from our investment in science. Our reforms to the science sector will create a flexible system that delivers to Government science priorities and enhances the impacts for New Zealand, including commercial impacts. The reforms address long-standing issues of lack of focus and scale, fragmentation, poor alignment and unproductive competition amongst the Crown Research Institutes (CRIs).

A key expectation is that the new larger Public Research Organisations (PROs) will be able to adapt to deliver to the highest priority science needs for Government. The PROs will have broader scope and scale, reducing the current fragmentation, and providing a broader base for multi-disciplinary science that supports both economic growth and stewardship, including environmental stewardship. Cabinet has agreed to progress work to create the new Bioeconomy and Earth Sciences PROs by consolidating current CRIs.

CRIs have been invited to develop merger proposals, with a view to future science needs, rather than a simple merger of existing organisations. They are actively considering how to create critical mass and focus, by bringing together key science capabilities and functions from across the system. The CRI chairs, working with MBIE, are well placed to advise the best alignment of capabilities to maximise science synergies and impacts. I see value in the mergers progressing without undue delay to reduce uncertainty and disruption to science delivery. I expect to consider their proposals in due course; these may include advice on the transfer of some capabilities across the proposed PRO clusters.

As you rightly acknowledge, there will always be a need for collaboration across science organisations. I expect the new PROs will have a distinct focus but will work together to leverage complementary capabilities and take common approaches. All PROs will undertake both stewardship and economic-growth focussed research. I expect all PROs to apply a range of disciplines and capabilities to develop economic opportunities for New Zealand, including partnering with users and investors. I am also considering appropriate mechanisms to regularly consider and update the focus and priorities of the PROs to ensure they remain relevant and deliver to our most important science needs.

I note your request under section 19 of the Environment Act for the detailed briefing papers that outline the case for placing Manaaki Whenua in the Bioeconomy PRO. I enclose a copy of a briefing (2425-0701) provided to the previous Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology, and request that this remain confidential at this point in time. I have received no advice on the detailed implications of the proposed mergers for Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research staff, and its data and collections.

Thank you for supplying a copy of your report on the funding and prioritisation of environmental research. I appreciate the importance of science funding mechanisms, and funding will remain a key lever for government to encourage collaboration and purchase specific outcomes and activities. I expect to receive advice on effective funding systems from the Science System Advisory Group chaired by Sir Peter Gluckman shortly.

Furthermore, thank you for your offer to meet to discuss environmental research. I have asked my office to arrange a meeting for us at a suitable time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S Reti', written over the printed name.

Dr Shane Reti

Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology