

CSIRO

CSIRO's global reputation 'trashed' and new science body needed, Senate told

Scientists say CSIRO losing students and climate scientists already looking for jobs elsewhere since cuts announced

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The CSIRO is planning to cut about 100 people from the oceans and atmosphere division in a move away from their role monitoring and modelling climate change. Photograph: Dan Peled/AAP

The global reputation of the CSIRO has already been “trashed” by the announced cuts to climate research there, world-leading [CSIRO](#) scientists told a Senate inquiry on Tuesday.

“Our reputation is now trashed, internationally,” said John Church, a CSIRO scientist who was speaking in his private capacity to a public hearing of the Senate select committee into the scrutiny of government budget measures in Hobart.

He said the CSIRO would no longer be able to recruit many of the top climate scientists, because its reputation has been so badly damaged by the announced cuts. “It would require a very significant new investment to convince leading international people to come to Australia.”



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He said that not only would the country now lose top scientists but they were already losing students.

“We had a Chinese student lined up to come in a couple of months’ time. Since this announcement, that student has decided they will not come to Australia, they will not come to Hobart, they will instead go to the USA.”

In addition, most climate scientists in the CSIRO were now looking for jobs elsewhere, said Richard Matear, another CSIRO climate scientist who appeared before the committee in a personal capacity. “Most scientists I’ve spoken to are looking in some way or another,” he said.

The cuts have also revealed an underlying problem with relying on the CSIRO to conduct “public good” research under its current model. Both researchers said a new model of funding was required for such research.

“I have grave doubts about the future of public good research in CSIRO in the current funding arrangements,” Church said. “I really think we’ve got to the stage where, at least for climate research, we need a new model to carry into the future.”

Matear agreed and said the problem was wider than just climate science: “Public good research at the CSIRO at the moment looks like a non-viable way forward. Maybe it’s climate this time around but it doesn’t make you confident that CSIRO will stay in this space.”

The pair said that CSIRO required for each dollar spent on research to be matched by external funding that is brought in by the research from “customers”, which wasn’t a model for research that was required for the public good.

In another submission, the climate scientist Trevor McDougall from the University of New South Wales, who had been at the CSIRO for 28 years, said that requirement combined with a Abbott-Turnbull government cut to climate research funding was responsible for the cut to climate science.

In the 2014-2015 budget, the government combined two climate research funding programs, **cutting \$21.7m in the process**. McDougall said climate science research needed to be excluded from the requirement to raise so much external funding, or a new public good research centre needed to be created.

Appearing before the inquiry, Alex Wonhas, the executive director of environment, energy and resources, appeared to indicate this was a factor in the cut to climate research at the CSIRO: “The customer for the climate work, that’s obviously a very difficult question. One of the proxies we use for that is ultimately the government’s investment into the space. And that’s certainly been looked at as one of different factors to inform that decision.”



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Church suggested a new centre similar to the UK’s [Hadley Centre for Climate Science and Services](#), which was housed within the Met Office – the equivalent of Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology.

In February this year, the chief executive of the CSIRO, Larry Marshall, announced he had decided to [cut about 100 people from the oceans and atmosphere division](#), in a move away from their historical role monitoring and modelling climate change.

It was quickly revealed that the decision had been made [with almost no consultation](#) within the organisation, or with other organisations in Australia and around the world that rely on work done by the CSIRO.

Appearing before the committee, Alex Wonhas acknowledged the perception that the CSIRO was moving away from public good research. “I want to categorically say that is not the case,” he said. “Public good research has been the absolute foundation of what the CSIRO has been doing over our very long history.”



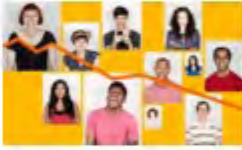
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