



CHASS Response to the Expert Working Groups Reports

About the Council for the Humanities Arts and Social Sciences

The Council for the Humanities Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) is the national peak body for 90 organisations including universities, schools and faculties, national institutions, professional peak bodies in design, performing arts, creative industries and arts and technology and others. We support our members in their advocacy for humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS), work with the government in strengthening the agenda around HASS issues and create links between policy and research in these learning areas. Currently CHASS is planning its landmark inaugural **The Human Dimension** National Forum in Canberra on 25 and 26 September. This aims to set a forward vision for the HASS sector and to link HASS learning to the burning issues facing Australia including sustainability, Australia in the Asian Century, science engagement and the human dimensions of new technology.

CHASS Feedback on the Four Expert Working Groups draft papers and recommendations

- *Inspiration from the Deserts (referred to here as 'Deserts')*
- *Science Engagement into and for Australia's Tropical Region ('Tropical Region')*
- *Indigenous Engagement with Science :Toward Deeper Understandings ('Indigenous')*
- *Effective Communication of Marine Science to the Australian Community ('Marine Science')*

General comments

Taken together, the four reports give a compelling and enlightening view of science engagement in Australia, and provide useful evidence and recommendations to the Inspiring Australia Strategy. Some comments are as follows:

- Each paper uses different definitions of 'science communication' or 'science engagement'. Some definitions are explicit and others implicit. The Tropical Region Expert Working Group uses 'science engagement', while the Deserts report favours 'science communication', defined as follows:

In this report, 'science communication refers to the wide range of activities that enable the public to interact with science, scientists and scientific issues and processes, and especially to apply scientific knowledge and insights in their own lives, work and thinking.
(p9)

- Each working paper also has subtly different definition of the nature and purpose of the *Inspiring Australia Strategy*.
 - o *Deserts*: 'IA seeks to build a strong open relationship between science and society, underpinned by effective communication of science and its uses.'
 - o *Tropical Region*: 'IA is a high-level national strategy for public engagement with the sciences and a key element of Australia's innovation agenda.'



- *Marine Science*: 'IA is a high-level national strategy for engagement with the sciences and a key element of Australia's innovation agenda.'
- *Indigenous*: 'IA is a national strategy led by (DIISR) with the broad aim of realising the full social, economic and environmental benefits of investment in science and research.'

The *Deserts* report states that it has worked with the Indigenous and Tropical Region Expert Groups to avoid overlap and to have a consistent approach (p.7). The Marine Science Expert Group could be more closely linked to the other three by consultation and cross-referencing, for example, by expanding Recommendation 14, 'That dialogue is encouraged between Indigenous communities that live on or near sea country, and researchers, industry, government and the public'. In its report, the Indigenous Expert Group replaces the term 'traditional knowledge' with the more comprehensive term 'indigenous knowledge systems'. CHASS notes that the Tropical Region report recommends full adoption of the Indigenous Expert Working Group recommendations as part of its own recommendations.

Specific comments:

- In Recommendation 13 of the Marine Science Report, there are comments about difficulties in engaging NGOs with marine science; more data or case studies would be helpful in understanding the challenges and creating solutions.
- The Marine Science Report could discuss the findings of its Marine Science Communicators survey in greater detail, either in discussing each survey question in detail, or integrating results in the greater body of the report.
- The 'increasingly important role of the social sciences' is noted in the Tropical Region report (p32); the role of 'the art world' in the Marine Science report (p5), and numerous cultural issues, including the idea of cultural competency (p12) are raised in the Indigenous report. In compiling its report to the **Expert Working Group on developing a national evidence base of completed research regarding public attitudes and behaviours towards science in Australia**, CHASS is exploring these issues through consultation with its membership about how humanities, arts and social sciences organisations engage the public in science.

CHASS Recommendations

1. That there is more inclusion of HASS knowledge and leadership in expanding and reviewing current models of science communication and engagement across the board. This would mean that HASS knowledge is not just used as an instrument of facilitating science communication but also in more 'bottom up' ways to understand a person centred approach to engaging individuals and communities with science.
2. That more integrated paradigms of communication and engagement (as suggested by the Indigenous EWG Group) are considered which could create interdisciplinary knowledge sharing between HASS and Science to deliver enhanced outcomes for science communication strategies.
3. That the Expert Working Group conveners discuss definitions and terms to establish a consistency among their reports. The Centre for the Public Awareness of Science at ANU (contact Suzette.searle@anu.edu.au) is working on definitions of science engagement/science communication and could offer useful advice in this regard.

4. That science communication models would need to look at cultural competency issues beyond Indigenous engagement given that nearly 45% of Australia's current population claim to come from overseas. In order to engage the broadest cross section of the Australian communities, cultural competency frameworks, as developed by service delivery design in other government sectors such as Department of Human Services, would need to be considered