



Thursday, 30 May 2019

NZ Association of Scientists applauds introducing living standards alongside traditional economic indicators in today's budget.

Today the NZ government announced its first wellbeing budget, acknowledging that traditional economic indicators do not necessarily measure what really matters for a society.

Similarly, “Whilst we might be looking for new funding increases in traditional and established science funding processes, we will not find those in the 2019 budget. Instead, the emphasis is on specific initiatives, such as resilience of our biosecurity system, focus on freshwater for various applications, climate-resilient growth and sustainable land use, which will result in flow-on effects into our NZ science system” says Dr Heide Friedrich, President of NZAS.

The NZ Association of Scientists, a 78 year old independent Association that advocates for science and scientists, applauds the government for exploring different proxies of what a thriving society encompasses, such as considering the human, natural and social capital alongside traditional economic indicators.

In New Zealand/Aotearoa we are proud to act as kaitiaki for our unique culture, land, flora and fauna and increased funding to support Te Reo Māori and Māori communities is also welcomed by the NZ Association of Scientists, as this is where many of our future scientists need to come from.

Dr Friedrich is concerned though that “One of the most serious issues in science and research is a lack of funding. Although I can see positive funding flow-on effects into the science system from the 2019 budget, we will still have a problem of excessive competition for too little funding. This creates a micro-managed environment, pushing the limits of meaningful performance indicators, and resulting in more elevated stress levels in scientists”.

“Conversely, a lack of appropriately sized science funding creates a work environment that places increased pressure on mental health, which is specifically part of what the wellbeing budget tries to address. We have to be careful when well-meaning initiatives indirectly contribute to what they try to fix.” Dr Friedrich says.

Finally, through supporting innovation, the government aims to contribute to the target of investing two per cent of New Zealand's GDP into R&D by 2027. Dr Friedrich raises the question “Can universities and CRI's adapt their often massive operations to better incubate

and work with start-ups to align with the government’s desire to support more radical and disruptive innovations?”

The New Zealand Association of Scientists (<https://scientists.org.nz/>) is made up of a wide cross-section of the New Zealand science community, from University departments to CRIs to those working in independent research organisations or in science-related policy development.

Contact: New Zealand Association of Scientists (NZAS) President Dr Heide Friedrich

email: h.friedrich@auckland.ac.nz | president@scientists.org.nz | ph: 022 6402255