



13 April 2021

Hon Dr Megan Woods
Minister of Research, Science and Innovation
Private Bag 18041
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

Dear Minister

Annual Letter of Expectations for 2021 / 22

Thank you for expressing your strategic and performance expectations of Manaaki Whenua for the 2021/22 financial year and beyond. Our current strategic direction and goals (Strategy-22) align well with your expectations, as we describe below. We are beginning the process of updating Strategy-22 and your expectations will provide valuable direction. Your specific expectation about proposed developments at Mt Albert is firmly on our strategic agenda. The outcome will depend heavily on our ability to develop a strong business case with MBIE and the other CRIs (Plant & Food and ESR), and preferably MPI, that will achieve the best outcome for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Strategic context

The past year has been challenging, especially for MBIE, and we greatly appreciate the solid support we have received from you and your officials. This has enabled us to retain staff in jobs and maintain national scientific capability and infrastructure. Staff morale has been maintained through the difficult times knowing the Government's support for RSI and CRIs in particular. It will be helpful in our strategic planning to know the Government's priorities for RSI as set out in your letter. In time, when they are published, we will value the Research, Science and Innovation Strategy (RSIS), and your thinking about the wider science system model, into which the Te Pae Kahurangi report and the PCE's report on environmental research have provided useful inputs. Important in our planning are also consideration of the National Science Challenge experience, the Collections Review, and current pan-CRI work on national science priorities and capability.

Manaaki Whenua outlook

We capitalised on a period of growing demand and investment between 2016 and 2019, recruiting new talent and building a strong culture in which staff are highly engaged. Our positive external relationships have created a strong RSI investment pipeline and impact for New Zealand. Events in 2020 paused our growth and the coming three years will see large, multi-year contracts come to an end, and constraints in government expenditure, creating a significant revenue gap. We have re-aligned our RSI directions to reflect the new focus of the Endeavour Fund on transformation, but our unusual lack of success in 2020 signifies greater risk for us in 2021-23. Our cash reserves will support us through a limited period of reduced revenue if necessary, but this will not be sustainable in the longer term and will put constraints on our ambitions, which include developing Māori engagement and capability.

Sector-wide ways of working

We note and welcome your emphasis on sector-wide ways of working in the RSI sector. The sector has pulled together well to address the immediate threat of Covid-19 and its long-term impacts. A shining example is the sector-wide work done to support Government's responses, to which we were pleased to contribute our people, and which was recognised in the Prime Minister's Science Prize. But we can do more on other themes such as climate change mitigation and adaptation. Manaaki Whenua is playing a significant role in areas such as the Auckland science centre concept, linking three CRIs and MPI; the joint postgraduate school linking two universities and three CRIs; the national environmental data centre concept (Data for Good) across the CRIs; and aligning the RSI and government sectors' pathways to zero-carbon through our subsidiary Toitū's programmes and our carbon research. Such partnerships require skills and effort, but importantly they require leadership, continuity and trust between the parties. Government can 'lead from the front' by demonstrating that leadership, continuity and trust.

Auckland Development

In recent years Manaaki Whenua have progressed the concept of co-located science at the Mt Albert site with Plant & Food Research, ESR and MPI. The driver for us to vacate our Tāmaki site has increased with the approved development on the adjacent land of very high-density urban living. The Mt Albert concept will benefit New Zealand by co-locating, sharing and developing system-wide science resources focused on biological security, food innovation, and support for the Pacific Nations in those areas. The business case for developing Mt Albert as an Auckland science centre has also increased with the potential for MPI to select that site for its major Plant Health and Environmental Health facility. We will work with our colleagues to develop the business case to ensure these developments take place in a coordinated way. We will explore options for its development and financing.

In the annex to this letter we set out our intentions in response to your expectations of CRIs collectively. In closing I would like to thank you again for your support and for visiting our Lincoln site to announce the VMCF awards. I extend a warm invitation for you to visit any of our sites and speak to our people about the superb work they do for the benefit of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Yours sincerely



Jane Taylor
Board Chair

cc Richard Gordon, Chief Executive
Michael Bird, MBIE

Annex: Our responses to the expectations of CRIs collectively

The headings below are as in the Letter of Expectation.

1. Accelerate New Zealand's economic recovery and deliver on Government priorities

In meeting your expectations we will:

- With MPI, industry, Māori and other CRIs, shape research priorities and programmes addressing the Fit for a Better World Roadmap.
- Proactively work with DOC, MfE and relevant stakeholders to revitalise the Conservation and Environment Science Roadmap as a set of national research priorities and the basis for strategic and consistent research investment.
- With other CRIs and relevant participants (e.g. Regional Councils), make fit-for-purpose data and information readily accessible by developing national environmental datasets.
- Contribute to delivering the Carbon Neutral Government Programme through our subsidiary, Toitū Envirocare, which is a principal provider to the public sector of programmes for carbon footprint assessment, management and certification.
- Act in accordance with the Public Service Commission's guidance and work to ensure pay equity and alignment with government organisations.

2. Te Pae Kahurangi Report

In meeting your expectations we will:

- Continue to work with other CRIs and members of the wider system to optimise collective action in matters of strategic planning, infrastructure development, resource and capability-sharing. Opportunities will be created with the close development of CRI facilities at Lincoln and Hamilton and the proposed development at Mt Albert.
- We believe that a 'research user' perspective is important in the pan-CRI approach to setting national science priorities. We will prioritise actions that can improve uptake and impact from RSI, such as shared data services ('no wrong door' approach), enhanced collaboration in programmes, and shared spaces and equipment.
- Continue to enhance our formal agreements with DOC, MfE, and several businesses, and strategic engagement plans with Māori entities. These agreements align our respective skills and programmes to enhance impact from limited resources.

3. COVID-19, hazard management and emergency response

In meeting your expectations we will:

- Continue to provide expert epidemiological modelling support to the national COVID-19 response.
- Work system-wide to ensure scientific capability gaps are addressed in our specialist field of plant biosecurity.
- Maintain business continuity plans to ensure resilience of our critical scientific capability and support role for critical government functions.

4. Vision Mātauranga

In meeting your expectations we will:

- Commit to upholding the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (partnership, participation and active protection of Māori interests) in our scope of work, and implement strategic plans that express our commitment.
- Actively build a culture with which Māori want to engage and that supports Māori recruitment and career development.

5. Well-being and workplace diversity

In meeting your expectations we will:

- Align our work to support diversity and inclusion with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and government's well-being framework.
 - Focus on equity in all aspects of our role as an employer.
 - Ensure the Future of Work empowers our people and does not create perverse outcomes for health, safety, well-being, belonging, career progression or gender equity.
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