



**Prime Minister's Science, Innovation and Technology Council (PMSITAC)
Meeting summary notes and actions**

Date: Friday 26 September 2025

Chair: Hon Dr Shane Reti, Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology

Attendees:

- PMSITAC members: Dr John Roche, Komal Mistry-Mehta, Sir Peter Gluckman, Professor Merryn Tawhai, Grant Wright, Russell Frew
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) representatives: Nic Blakeley, Iain Cossar, Privacy of natural persons
- Apologies: Craig Piggott, Malcolm Johns

1. Introductions

- The Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology explained the purpose of this meeting and its intended outcomes.
- Previous notes and action log were reviewed and accepted.
- MBIE reiterated the conflict-of-interest process and requested declarations of any new conflicts. No new conflicts of interest were declared.

Out of Scope

- AI infrastructure was identified as a significant issue. SSAG report had also highlighted the need for significant investment.
- Members supported initiating work within the system to support coordination and the potential for a national level approach for infrastructure, noting that without this, New Zealand would face risks. Officials noted this as a potential action for the 2026 PMSITAC work programme.

2. Item 1: Giving effect to strategy by investing more in Advanced Technology

(Relevant papers: slide pack: Mapping of priorities against existing investments)

- MBIE provided an overview of:
 - scenario 2 ("Modernise") and its implications, including funding shifts across pillars.
 - shared working definitions for each pillar and rationale for renaming "New Economy" to "Technology Economy".
 - analysis of institutional impacts, including funding reductions and opportunities to pivot toward advanced tech.

- Key themes of the discussion are summarised below:
 - Members discussed renaming the “Economic Growth & Resilience” pillar to better distinguish it from “Environment” (suggestions included “Natural Capital Economy”) and make clear the overall intent of the pillar.
 - The Minister responded to questions on the “Environment” pillar and confirmed that the pillar is not considered “sacrosanct”. Environmental research already exists within the economic growth pillar and could be redistributed.
 - Scenario 2 (“Modernise”) was endorsed as a preferred pathway but viewed as a “glide path” toward the more ambitious Scenario 1.
 - BSI would be disproportionately affected under Scenario 2, with further impacts through contestable funding likely on those institutions which specialise in primary production and health science and research.
 - Members expressed comfort with reducing agriculture R&D, citing the relative weight of balance between public investment and private sector contribution. In addition, the maturity of the sector means that there is capacity for further industry investment.
 - Synthetic biology and gene technologies were identified as key enablers for future agricultural innovation.
 - A 6–7% reduction in agriculture funding was considered manageable.
 - Concerns were raised about the low proportion of funding currently going to emerging technologies (less than 5% in the Endeavour Fund).
 - The Minister expressed comfort with reducing investment in the HASS pillar given that a significant proportion of funding into HASS disciplines comes via PBRF.

Action Area	Requested Information / Action
Pillar definitions	Officials to clarify pillar definitions and boundaries require review, especially to clarify overlaps and environmental content.
Naming of Economic Growth pillar	Members notes concerns about the name of the Economic Growth pillar; Minister asked officials to present new names for this pillar to better reflect its intent.

3. Item 2: Identifying research priorities and areas to deprioritise

(Relevant paper: slide pack: Mapping of priorities against existing investments)

- Minister comments:
 - The Minister proposed shifting the current 55:45 contestable-to-strategic funding ratio toward 40:60 to align with OECD norms.
- Key themes of the discussion are summarised below:
 - Strategic funding can still include contestable elements
 - Support was expressed for developing new mechanisms to bring COREs closer to government priorities.

- ‘Investigator-led’ and ‘mission-led’ approaches were discussed as alternatives to ‘thematic funding’.
- A robust performance management system is needed to support prioritisation and track outcomes.
- Officials were asked to apply prioritisation principles when considering how current and future, research investment decisions are made. This was noted as key information for the Research Funding New Zealand Board once the entity was established.
- The following Prioritisation Principles were proposed:
 - Research quality
 - Relevance to New Zealand
 - Justification for taxpayer investment
 - Public good nature of the science/research
 - Sector interest
 - Workforce development impacts
 - Bottom-up innovation
 - Industry impact
 - International investment potential.
- Members also noted perceived inefficiencies and duplication across the CRIs, which again were highlighted in the first SSAG report.
- Fragmentation across the research ecosystem was identified as a key issue which PMSITAC would remain interested in.
- Officials were asked to refine prioritisation principles and explore how to better engage end users in priority setting.

Action Area	Requested Information / Action
Prioritisation principles	MBIE to further develop prioritisation principles by ensuring they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support decision making across pillars - Are bold and ambitious - Inform funding decisions and deprioritisation principles
Naming conventions	MBIE to change wording from contestable and investigator led research to mission-led and thematic research

Item 3: White Space Funding

(Relevant paper: Relevant papers: slide pack: Mapping of priorities against existing investments)

- Minister comments:
 - Minister supportive of white space initiative and fund amount
- Key themes of the discussion are summarised below:

- The concept of a White Space Fund was strongly supported as a mechanism to enable high-risk, high-reward research.
- The proposal is progressing but requires further refinement before being finalised and presented to the Minister.
- Members agreed the fund should support fast-fail innovation and disruptive ideas, with flexibility in how funding is allocated.
- Confidential advice [REDACTED]
- Members emphasised the need for a clear decision-making framework, and further analysis including:
 - Definitions of what qualifies as white space
 - Examples of what is and isn't white space
 - Who makes funding decisions
 - International models such as ARIA (UK), DARPA (US), and Singapore's Cabinet-level approach were referenced.


Action Area	Requested Information / Action
Defining white space	Officials to further clarify the scope and boundaries of White Space Funding, including what types of research and initiatives are considered in-scope or out-of-scope.
International comparison	Officials to provide a comparative analysis of international White Space funding models (e.g. ARIA, DARPA, Singapore), highlighting lessons relevant to New Zealand's context.

Wrap up

- AI infrastructure flagged as a priority—stocktake of current systems and gaps across PROs and universities to be initiated.
- October meeting will focus solely on the draft priorities report.
- Officials to provide advice on how to support a culture shift in how researchers engage with the system as new changes are embedded.
- Mission-led prioritisation approach endorsed.
- Minister raised the possibility of inclusion of a standing item on Māori science and research; follow-up required to clarify intent.

PMSITAC Decisions

- The table below summarises decisions from the meeting:

Item Number	Decisions
Introduction	Agreed Minutes and actions from the 22 August PMSITAC meeting
Item 1	<p>Agree to recommend the funding reprioritisation described in Scenario 2 “Modernise”</p> <p>Agree to recommend reprioritisation of \$122m by 2028/29 from Economic Growth and Resilience and Health and Society into the New Technology Economy pillar</p>
Item 2	<p>Agree that priorities will be presented using a mission-led, thematic pillars approach</p> <p>Agree in-principle to SI&T areas to prioritise within pillars</p> <p>Agree on the signals that will guide de-prioritisation, along with expectations for how organisations should respond</p>
Item 3	<p>Agree on the definition and principles of the White Space Fund</p> <p>Agree that New Zealand needs a white space fund</p> <p>Agree that a white space fund include all proposed pillars</p> <p>Confidential advice </p> <p>Agree that MBIE will conduct further work to determine how a WSF can be designed and implemented as part of the RFNZ establishment process</p>