

Public Perceptions of a Management Culture of Intimidation, Bullying and Harassment at CSIRO – 4

Involuntary Separation: Case Studies of 14 Senior Scientists

Numerous Respected Scientists have been Forcibly Retrenched or Resigned under Duress from CSIRO

A Brief Overview of Concerns

To date, we are aware of the stories of over 60 CSIRO employees who claim to have, in one way or another, experienced management bullying and harassment while employed by CSIRO. These are people whose lives have often been destroyed or seriously damaged by their experiences. Many are from low and junior ranks in the organisation, where they would be particularly vulnerable to management abuse. Most have been involuntarily separated from CSIRO, either by retrenchment or resignation under duress.

“A Few Grumpy Scientists”

Senator Kim Carr said (To Dr Sandland, Deputy Head, CSIRO):

“Could I ask you Dr Sandland about the recent publicity concerning loss of senior staff. Dr Chris Strauss, Dr Colin Ward, Dr Graeme Pearman, Dr Fred Prata, Dr Annabelle Duncan, and Dr Tony Schlink are just a few. It would appear that there has been an increase in the rate of attrition amongst senior CSIRO scientists. Is that the case?” ...

“When I raised these issues with you, I think, four years ago, you said to me it was essentially the work of a few grumpy ex-scientists ...” ... “I have paraphrased you”

[Hansard, Senate Estimates Hearings, 14 February 2007](#)

Our Experience:

Sixty stories, many from junior staff, are more than “a few grumpy scientists” ...

We invite you to leave your story (anonymously if necessary):

We invite you to add your story to our database. Anonymous postings are welcome.

14 High Profile Cases from Amongst 60 or More

Below are listed 14 of the more high-profile stories that have appeared in the media:

(1) The case of Ruth Hall:

Hall was a leading expert in antibiotic resistance who was involuntarily retrenched from CSIRO in 2003. In 2005 she was elected to the Australian Academy of Science. In 2011 she won the McFarlane Burnet Medal of the Australian Academy of Science. According to newspaper articles at the time:

- **The Industrial Relations Commission stated that the forced redundancy of Ruth Hall “smacked of real harshness and injustice”. It “raised real issues of public interest”**

(These issues of public interest were never aired because CSIRO made a confidential settlement with Hall)

- “A colleague said the sacking of Ruth Hall was like the Australian Institute of Sport deciding that it didn’t have sufficient funds to contest the 1500 metres event and making Ian Thorpe redundant”
- “Dr Air, an Australian, said the scientific community was “mystified as to why CSIRO considers this research irrelevant”. She said: “There are labs overseas working hard to catch up with Ruth”.
- According to a leading flu researcher: “Dr Hall’s problems are insignificant compared to those of CSIRO”.

[“No CSIRO Place for Top Biologist”, The Age, 27 Jul 2003](#)

(2) The case of Roger Francey:

- **Francey won a Federation Fellowship in 2003 – the most prestigious and lucrative fellowship award made by the Australian Research Council**
- **But, he was forced to hand it back after CSIRO changed its mind. He was retired in Jan 2004** after 31 years in CSIRO, during which he was promoted to Chief Research Scientist level.

[“Discarded Scientists Fail to Grasp CSIRO Logic”, The Age, 11 Feb 2006](#)

Francey won the Victoria Prize Award in 2001 and is an honorary fellow at CSIRO Aspendale

(3)-(5) The cases of Graeme Pearman, Barrie Pittock, and Barney Foran:

In 2006, ABC Four Corners exposed the gagging of CSIRO environmental scientists about the dangers of global warming:

Graeme Pearman:

Q. Did you feel you were compromised?

A. **I was definitely compromised and it was probably only because I was in the later stages of my career that I could handle it. I could see that a young person placed in this position ... would probably have to roll over.**

Q. Why do you believe you were made redundant at CSIRO? **Could they have found a job for you if they really wanted?**

A. **I think they could have, yes.**

[ABC Four Corners – 13/02/2006: Interview – Dr Graeme Pearman](#)

- **“He [Pearman] was concerned about increasing pressure on researchers whose work or professional opinions were not in line with ... [CSIROs]”**

[“Scientists bitter over interference” The Age 13 February 2006](#)

Barney Foran:

JANINE COHEN: **Barney Foran says if scientists fight too hard ... there will be no funding. Is that true?**

STEVE MORTON, CSIRO EXECUTIVE: **Of course not**

JANINE COHEN: **Four Corners spoke to several scientists off-camera, who claimed they’d been censored but weren’t willing to go public for fear of losing their jobs or funding.**

Barrie Pittock:

“I was expressly told not to talk about ... how you might reduce greenhouse gases”

[ABC Four Corners – 13/02/2006: Program transcript](#)

Pearman was Chief of CSIRO Atmospheric Research from 1992-2002. He received the CSIRO Medal in 1988, UNEP Global 500 Award in 1989. He was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science in 1989 and Fellow of the Royal Society of Victoria in 1997. He received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 1999 and a Federation Medal in 2003.

CSIROs policy boiled down to CSIROs senior executives deciding what is “the truth” for public consumption. Today climate warming and remediation measure are perhaps the major public policy debate in Australia

(6) The case of Colin Ward:

- Three time winner of CSIROs highest honour, the Chairman’s Medal
- Hailed as a potential Nobel Prize winner
- The CSIRO Chairperson praised his work as “reflecting the quality of science being delivered by CSIRO”
- **He was involuntarily retired by CSIRO in 2006, within weeks of winning the CSIRO Chairman’s medal yet again**
- His work was instrumental in the discovery of the first universal flue drug, *Relenza*TM, and the establishment of the ASX-listed company, *Biota*. (Market capitalisation at the time: \$200 million).

[“CSIRO Dumps Landmark Team”, Rosslyn Beeby, Canberra Times, 18 Nov 2006](#)

In 2007, Ward was recipient of the Lemberg Medal, the highest award of the Australian Academy of Science. Ward is in the top 15 most highly published and cited CSIRO scientists of all time. Biota is one of the most successful Australian spin-off companies ever

(7) The case of Chris Strauss:

- Strauss was a scientist at the forefront of his research field, using microwaves to carry out organic chemical synthesis. He designed and built one of the first microwave reactors and is considered a “father” of microwave chemistry internationally.
- **Strauss received numerous awards for his ground-breaking work, including the 2005 Birch Medal, which is the highest award that the Royal Australian Chemical Institute (RACI) can bestow, and the RACI Inaugural Green Chemistry Award. He was the first (and only) CSIRO scientist to ever win the Birch Medal. That was in 2005.**
- **In 2006 he was made involuntarily redundant by CSIRO.**
- Microwave reactions are today a major new field in synthetic chemistry.

After his redundancy, Strauss took up a chair professorship at the Queens University in Belfast, Northern Ireland

(8) The case of Tony Schlink:

Schlink was made redundant in 2007:

- **“The CSIRO has dumped Australia’s top wool scientist, claiming his internationally acknowledged expertise is now irrelevant”**

- **“The CSIRO Staff Association described Dr Schlink’s redundancy as a tragedy for Australian Science”**
- “Senator Kim Carr described his departure as ‘yet another in a disturbingly long line of highly successful scientists whose research has been abruptly terminated”
- “Senator Rachel Sienert said ... ‘sent a clear message that scientists are not being valued any more”

[Rosslyn Beeby, Canberra Times, 11 Jan 2007](#)

- **“A number of senior agricultural scientists have criticized the decision to sack Dr Schlink. The Dean of Agriculture at the University of Western Australia described [CSIRO] management as engaging in weasel words.”**
- “He was definitely working in consumer oriented wool research – that is, wool shrinkage, dye, fabrics, and the like – two years ago, **and you made the decision to move him**”. ... **“Then you sacked him for not being in the area in which he had a particular world-leading expertise – isn’t that the case?”**

[Senator Kim Carr, Hansard, Senate Estimates Hearings, 14 February 2007](#)

Schlink went on to join the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food

(9) The case of Maarten Stapper:

ABCs *Australian Story* aired a program on 1 June 2009 about Maarten Stapper, who worked for CSIRO for 23 years and was then retrenched (- watch the story here:

<http://www.abc.net.au/austory/specials/stapper/default.htm>). Stapper was a CSIRO soil scientist who argued passionately for organic farming. He has been well supported by the farming community. Large parts of the Australian agricultural industry have converted to organic farming. In the program several farmers with whom he worked on organic farming project, hailed his vision and said that Stapper had been a boon to Australian farming.

- **“CSIRO management bullied and harassed him and tried to gag his criticisms of GM (Genetically Modified) crops. He left ... after his position was made redundant”**
[“CSIRO dumps anti-GM expert”, The Sunday Age, 27 May 2007](#)
- “The Chief of CSIRO Plant Industries Division ... confirmed that Dr Stapper had ... filed complaints alleging ... bullying and harassment”. But these had been “appropriately dealt with and dismissed”.
- “In emails obtained by the Canberra Times, Dr Stapper wrote to a colleague that he had been “isolated” by CSIRO management and there was no support for his area of research”
[Rosslyn Beeby, Canberra Times, 21 March 2007](#)
- Later CSIRO Plant Industry Deputy Head, T. J. Higgins, undertook a letter-writing campaign urging Australian farmers not to boycott GM products. The campaign allegedly “backfired badly”. “Dr Higgins is ... CSIROs co-inventor of the GM Field Pea, abandoned because toxicologists found it caused immune problems and lung damage in mice”.
[“CSIRO scientists GM letter campaign backfires” Crickey weekender 21 July 2008](#)

Stapper currently runs his own private consulting business in Canberra, catering to Australian agriculture. He travels the country educating farmers on how to use less chemicals in their soil and on their crops.

(10) The case of Fred Prata:

- Prata discovered a thermal imaging method that could allow aircraft to detect volcanic ash
- Without his approval, CSIRO decided to turn the invention into a spin-off company and appointed a commercial manager to commercialize his discovery.
- Prata complained that the commercialization was premature, - the science was not yet ready
- The manager lined up *Tenix* as a potential client and wanted Prata to “create” a patent before the data needed for it was available.
- Prata refused because the science was not settled and needed more testing.
- **Prata claims to have been pressured and intimidated to sign off on a patent concerning his invention that had been drawn up and lodged without his knowledge or consent, and with which he did not agree.**
- Prata was then made redundant by CSIRO

[“CSIRO Innovation Goes Up in Smoke”, Australasian Science Jan/Feb 2007](#)

- In 2007, Senator Kim Carr asked Dr Steele of CSIRO at the Senate Estimates:
 “Why was he (Prata) made redundant then?”
 Answer: “He was made redundant because the project had got to the end of the research phase.” (i.e. because CSIRO believed the research was complete and the technology needed to be commercialized)

[Hansard, Senate Estimates Hearings, 14 February 2007](#)

- In effect, the Hansard record appears to indicate that Prata was made redundant for failing to obey a CSIRO directive that directly contradicted his personal scientific judgement, as the expert and the inventor in this case. Effectively it appears that CSIRO demanded he sign off on an invention disclosure that he considered false and, when he refused, they deemed him redundant.

- In 2010 a volcanic eruption in Iceland halted all air traffic over Europe for a week and created worldwide chaos. Prata’s invention could have kept all of those planes flying. A CSIRO spokesman (Bruce Mapsten) said that **CSIRO had “no regrets” about retrenching Prata**

[“Volcano chaos could have been avoided”, ABC 7:30 Report, 29 April 2010](#)

- “There's also a strong message for Australia's matrix management-obsessed science bureaucrats in the career trajectory of atmospheric physicist Fred Prata. Four years ago, he was made redundant by CSIRO and told the invention he'd been working on - an airborne device to detect volcanic ash clouds - was not "value for money". Demoralised and disheartened, he was offered work with the Norwegian Institute for Air Research, who encouraged him to keep working on the technology. Now, one of the world's biggest aircraft manufacturers is testing the wing-mounted radar device, and it's set to become mandatory aviation safety equipment. ... Once the technology becomes commercially available, Australia's loss will be Norway's gain.”

[“Making Science Redundant”, Canberra Times, 29 Dec 2011](#)

Prata is today a professor at the Norwegian Institute for Air Research (NLU) in Oslo. Several other scientists have alleged to colleagues that they were involuntarily forced to turn their work into spin-off companies. Invariably, such scientists ended up having their careers at CSIRO ruined as a result.

(11) The case of Clive Spash:

- Spash wrote a paper raising a series of fundamental problems with carbon trading schemes. The paper was approved by internal reviewers at the CSIRO and sent to a journal with the approval of management. After revision the paper was accepted for publication by the prestigious economics journal, *New Political Economy*.
- Spash was then instructed by CSIRO management to withdraw the paper on grounds of its political sensitivity. Later he was given a list of amendments and changes to the article which he was to accept without questioning, despite these changing the substance and meaning of the article.
- **Considerable pressure was placed upon Spash and his co-author. His CSIRO co-author then withdrew from authorship of the paper**
- **In the media Spash was reported as having been harassed and is reported as stating– “Inappropriate mention of disciplinary action and implied dismissal were cited”.**
- In a letter to Senator Carr, reported in *Nature*, an editor from the journal *New Political Economy* stated they refused to publish the CSIRO-amended version of the paper.
- Spash refused to change the paper and resigned under duress in 2009.
- **On resigning the media reported him as stating: “I have been treated extremely poorly”. “I have been to the doctor under extreme stress”**
- Spash's case and Censorship at the CSIRO was debated in the Senate and his case has been raised repeatedly in Senate Estimates.
- Spash has called for a Senate Enquiry into CSIRO management practices.
 - [“CSIRO scientist resigns, calls for Senate inquiry”, Business Spectator, 3 Dec 2009](#)
 - [“CSIRO in denial over policy debate” news.com.au, 11 Feb 2010](#)
 - [“Scientist quits CSIRO amid censorship claim” Sydney Morning Herald, 4 Dec 2009](#)
- “Clive Spash, an economics professor, quit late last year after CSIRO stopped him publishing a paper critical of the proposed emissions trading scheme. Playing dirty pool, the Minister for Science, Kim Carr, later smeared Spash's reputation under parliamentary privilege, attacking the poor quality of his work. Spash, who now has academic posts in Norway and (soon) Austria, says ... Carr's conduct was "unbelievable" and the quality of his work was only questioned after the dispute went public. "Not only is it a blatant lie - because the paper was accepted for publication in what the Australian Research Council ranks as an A-class journal - but the minister is arguing that he, as a high school teacher, is able to be a better judge of quality than the scientific peer review community and the ARC, in a field in which he has no knowledge at all."
 - [“CSIRO in bed with big coal”, Brisbane Times & Sydney Morning Herald, 3 Jul 2010](#)
- Senator Christine Milne asked the following question of Dr Sandland, Deputy Head of CSIRO in the Senate Estimates of 14 February 2007:

“So, there has never been an occasion where a scientific paper has been suppressed or doctored because it may have implications for government policy?”

Sandland answered:

“To the best of my knowledge, a scientific paper has not been doctored or suppressed because of its potential implications for policy. We do, in fact, have an internal review process for our scientific publications”.

 - [Hansard, Senate Estimates Hearings, 14 February 2007](#)

In 2011, it came to light that the CSIRO CEO held an undeclared interest in a company that was allegedly set to benefit from carbon trading.

Spash is currently a professor at the Vienna University of Economics and Business in Austria. More information on his case is available on his personal website is <http://www.clivespash.org/>

(12) The case of Warwick Raverty:

Raverty claims to have been subjected to intimidation and bullying while working in a senior position at CSIRO. He resigned from CSIRO in 2009 in protest at his treatment. In his letter of resignation circulated to many staff at the time, he said:

- **“A steady stream of Insight Surveys over the last 5 years has highlighted an ever-widening gap between ... scientists and ... [the] extraordinarily large number of CSIRO administrators who seem to me ... to be a very long way from ... the finest in the land”**
- “any organisation that loses the ability to retain its best and brightest is in serious trouble”
- **“CSIRO has become so bureaucratic ... so dysfunctional, that I no longer see my employment as ... an effective solution to the problems of Australia”**

(13) The case of Sylwester Chyb:

- **“An award-winning entomologist headhunted from Britain is taking the CSIRO to Federal Court alleging he was harassed, bullied and unlawfully terminated”.**
- “Sylwester Chyb -- an expert in insect neurobiology -- also claims the national research body violated its own misconduct policy by failing to investigate his grievances and tolerating the bullying”.
- “He also alleges in his statement of claim that CSIRO misrepresented details of his employment and failed to meet its contractual obligations”.
- “This is more than a personal dispute,” argued Dr Chyb, previously with Imperial College London, where he set up the Laboratory of Molecular Physiology. Dr Chyb claimed international scientists could be put off by his experience and the apparent clash of scientific cultures.”
- Chyb is suing CSIRO in Federal Court. His court date is expected to be in late 2012.
[“Scientist takes CSIRO to court for bullying”, The Australian 28 June 2011](#)

(14) The case of Trevor McDougal:

- McDougal was a CSIRO Fellow and member of the Australian Academy of Science. He was a world leader in his field of oceanography and winner of 2011 Prince Albert I Medal, an award given once every two years.
- He was made redundant on Dec 2012 after CSIRO said it could no longer support “fundamental science”. However allegations were immediately levelled that McDougal was punished for speaking out against deeply flawed scientific decisions by management.
- The allegations were made by journalistic sources and not by Dr McDougal, who has since stated publicly that he does not consider himself to have been bullied in the retrenchment.
- Canberra Times: **“CSIRO Headliner in July, Sacked in November”**
- “Sources within CSIRO have described Dr McDougall as “a brilliant scientist and critically independent thinker” who openly challenged executive management decisions to move away from fundamental research on world ocean circulation and chemistry. They told *The Canberra Times* they believed that as a consequence of speaking out, Dr McDougall had a

string of research proposals rejected by management review committees, despite gaining support from top international scientists for his work."

- **"The Canberra Times obtained copies of two internal reports which reveal an independent expert science review panel recommended CSIRO boost and continue support for Dr McDougall's research, praising it as impressive and world-renowned."**
- "The redundancy promoted a backlash of criticism from some of the world's top climate scientists, who accused CSIRO of dumping "unique and pioneering" climate research that "was pushing the field ahead in a huge range of areas"."
- **"More than 160 of the world's top oceans and climate scientists signed a letter emailed to CSIRO chief executive Megan Clark, protesting Dr McDougall's dismissal. In anything but diplomatic terminology the letter said that CSIRO is "relinquishing its responsibility" to global climate science and is "taking definitive steps towards mediocrity" by abandoning "high-impact research"."**
- "Since Ms Beeby wrote her account in the *The Canberra Times*, *the-funneled-web.com* received an email from a UK reader noting that a second letter carrying over 150 signatures has been sent and which included the newly appointed Minister for Research Senator Chris Evans as a recipient."
- Four months after been made redundant by CSIRO, McDougal was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of London.

["CSIRO Headliner in July, Sacked in November". The Funneled Web, Canberra Times, December 25, 2011](#)

["Top Honour for Dumped Researcher", Canberra Times, 21 April 2012](#)

["CSIRO, top scientist could not 'align' their interests", Canberra Times, 15 Feb 2012](#)