

EDITORIAL

ONCE upon a time there was a beautiful paradise, with mountains and fiords, lakes and rivers, which people from every corner of the Earth clamoured to come and see.

Beneath the beauty, though, lay danger. Earthquakes, volcanoes, mountainsides slipping away, storms, floods, tsunami. A merry band of the best minds had been gathered together to protect the common people from such perils. Until one day, a foolish leader decided they were no longer needed and let them go.

Fairy tales, even grim ones more redolent of bad dreams, often have a great deal of truth to them. Certainly what is happening to our science sector, and to our universities, right now is the stuff of nightmares.

This threatened loss of essential geoscience knowledge from the retrenching Victoria University of Wellington is just one example of what is occurring throughout the country as a result of many years of mismanagement of the university sector. It is hugely

concerning that this Government is just standing back and watching universities, built on the accumulated expertise of its researchers, crumble. By doing that, the Government is also complicit in overseeing the erosion of our public science sector.

The Government's actions, or more accurately lack of actions, come as such a disappointment to those who know how important science, of all kinds, is to our future. A strong science sector is good for the economy, for our wellbeing, and for our safety and resilience.

Labour has made it perfectly clear it does not want to dirty its hands by stepping in to save those areas in jeopardy. The apparent lack of interest or anxiety, and lack of empathy, for those facing the chop making into absolute humbug the Government's much-

Failing science, Government-style

The Otago Daily Times

vaunted statements about intentions to boost New Zealand science and recognise it as a pre-cursor asset underpinning the rest of the economy.

For the past few years, many hundreds of scientists, researchers, policy makers and followers of science have contributed thousands of hours towards efforts to reform the science sector.

In October 2021, the Government released a green paper on a new "vision for research, science and innovation in New Zealand. After feedback, the white paper, Te Ara Paerangi, came out last December.

All these things are long overdue. The blueprint for much-needed change was warmly welcomed by most in the sector, and work has been continuing on the plan since it was released.

However, given what has been happening in our universities in recent weeks, it is difficult not to laugh at some of the comments made by research, science and innovation minister Dr Ayesha Verrall when Te Ara Paerangi was unveiled.

"These priorities will promote greater impact from science by building stronger connections between researchers," "... a stronger focus on people, with an emphasis on building sustainable and fulfilling career paths in science ...", "the system will

ultimately lead to changes to the now 31-year-old network of Crown research institutes.

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"These priorities will promote greater impact from science by building stronger connections between researchers," "... a stronger focus on people, with an emphasis on building sustainable and fulfilling career paths in science ...", "the system will

become better for those working within it ...", "it is important we get these changes right."

True, the Government recently announced \$400 million for three research hubs in Wellington, although it has been pointed out the money might better be spent on researchers themselves rather than on "outcomes", buildings and equipment. Others say if universities continue to cut scientists, and the Government continues to show no interest in that happening, how will these hubs actually be effective and any more than a red herring?

Do we actually want to do better science? Do we actually want to increase our measly science spending from around 1.5% of GDP to even 2%, still far lower than that of countries we like to compare ourselves with? The Government's current attitude shows it doesn't really seem all that bothered. If there was a "vision", cataracts now seem to be clouding it. It is worth noting the Government is acting like hypocrites.

Letters to the editor

Call me biased if you want but facts are facts

CHRISTOPHER Luxon's throwaway remark about getting New Zealand's "mojo" back sounds awfully like Donald Trump's trademark slogan "Make America Great Again".

Under Luxon, National responds automatically to Labour's achievements with emotive negatives rather than substantive alternatives. Case in point: he said he would reinstate the \$5 prescription fee because people needing regular prescriptions for contraception did not have "high medical needs".

What basis did he have for this assertion? Where are the data? The women of New Zealand will remember that, come October.

I have been a member of the Labour Party since 1971, so call me biased. But facts are not. The fact is that thanks to our current government, the Economist places New Zealand top in the world for handling the Covid pandemic, with fewer excess deaths than any other comparable country. Just imagine the devastation and despair if New Zealand, like Bulgaria, had suffered 38,000 excess deaths instead of 3000.

It's also a fact that New Zealand's economic recovery from Covid puts us in the top 10 countries in the OECD. Wide-ranging government initiatives, from subsidies for Covid-affected businesses to free school lunches to raising the minimum wage have helped shield us from the worst of it. Would Luxon turn the clock back on all that too? I'd really like to know.

Jocelyn Harris
Dunedin
[Abridged]

I do not believe it

I COULDN'T believe what I was reading. "Cost queries culturally insensitive: uni" (ODT 14.6.23). As a taxpayer, I write to express my outrage at the response of the Otago University to the OIA request from the ODT. The use of public funds for a matter of public interest, particularly when it involves an organisation that is poorly performing in a self-

confessed "downward spiral" — and asking to be bailed out with even more public funds. The public deserve to know that taxpayer-derived money is being used wisely.

L. Wakefield
Dunedin

Carbon conundrum

IN the article "Farm to Forestry rule changes criticised" (ODT, 16.6.23) Peeni Henare states that "without expansion of forests, reaching carbon zero won't be possible".

I would like to point out that productive farmland, farmed regeneratively, can be a significant sequester of carbon. In addition it stays in the ground.

Niels Olsen farms in Western Australia, and the government is paying carbon credit units to him for drawing carbon out of the atmosphere. Results from 2017 show that he sequestered 12t CO₂e per hectare. As well as improving his soil and productivity, reducing CO₂ in the atmosphere, he has another income stream.

Mary Grant
Dunedin

Head wear

NEW Zealand has the most successful all-age mandatory bicycle helmet law in the world since enactment in 1994. The results and statistics speak for themselves.

After viewing Carl Hayman's sad plight of early dementia from head knocks during his rugby career one wonders if it would be beneficial if head gear became mandatory university?

Surely this would be a great step forward and a safeguard for players, hospitals, and medical staff. Helmets are worn by American footballers, cycling and ice hockey players to name some sporting codes. Why couldn't the rugby code follow suit?

The Rev Wayne Healey,
Oamaru.

the consumption was also the highest per head of population. Production and distribution were carried on under such hygienic conditions that the standard was maintained, and although pasteurisation was now practised experts had carried the perfecting of the system to such a stage that they were looking to the time when they would be able to supply to the consumer without pasteurisation. The need for greater care in the preparation of our product for export was emphasised by Mr Garrett, who said that from information received in London of specific instances it was imperative that closer attention be paid to butter and cheese, particularly in regard to the question of moisture in butter and the packing of cheese, in it had been found that some of the crates were not suitable for the handling they received. He had been told by one of the leading Danish professors that New Zealand was the country they feared most in competition. It was

Cartoonist's view — Yeo



National's GM/GE policy raises questions

THE pledge by National to relax restrictions on release of genetically engineered organisms into the wider environment in New Zealand raises a number of questions.

How will the proposed regulatory agency tasked with controlling the release and application of GE organisms into the wider environment prevent itself becoming captured by the biotech industry, whose safety assessments of GE organisms are predominantly performed by research facilities funded by that industry?

How will the organic agriculture sector avoid GE contamination? Once a foodstuff contains GE material, it can no longer be certified as organic.

Currently, the organics sector in NZ is worth around \$1 billion per year. The contamination issue would also apply to conventionally grown produce marketed as "GE-free".

Will the insurance industry insure GE-free producers against GE contamination, and if not, where does that leave those growers? How will foodstuffs made from, or containing, GE-sourced ingredients be labelled so that consumers can make informed choices in their purchases?

Who will pay for the extra labelling and the bureaucratic oversight to ensure compliance with labelling standards? Where is the evidence that New Zealand is suffering

economically from prohibiting release of GE organisms into the wider environment?

It must be noted that GE for medical purposes is supported and well advanced in New Zealand. To suggest we are opposed to GE in New Zealand is a false and dishonest claim to gain political points in the lead-up to the October election.

Paul Elwell-Sutton,
Haast
[Abridged]

BIBLE READING: Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. — James 5.8.

Reports pored over in search for truth

AFTER delving into the University of Otago's annual reports, some clarity on the university's financial management.

The University Group (University, Holding Company, and the Foundation Trust) annual reports for 2012-23 show a total operating surplus of \$420.4 million (nine years of surplus, totalling \$453.1 million, less a one year deficit of \$14.7 million). The University Group annual report for 2022 shows a deficit of \$14.7 million. This appears to have largely come about via the university's Foundation Trust 2022 deficit of \$19.4 million, versus a budgeted surplus of \$7.9 million.

Their annual reports states (my definitions in brackets): This deficit (spending beyond its means) is due to "unrealised losses on the revaluation of investments (decrease in the value of an ongoing investment) held by the Foundation Trust. This was offset in part by the university response in achieving a savings target in the university in order to meet budget."

It is worth noting in 2022 the senior management team were paid \$4.32 million. General and academic staff should not have this laid at their feet, nor should the university be begging the Government. It is the university council and senior management team that are responsible for this parlous state of affairs.

Scott Muir
Dunedin

Turn out the lights

IT seems incredulous that the powers that be deem it necessary to install street lights on the intersections of 7 Mile Rd in the Lower Waitaki Valley. If this is a Road to Zero initiative then local residents would say that the presence of the greater more frequently on the compromised, corrugated network of gravel roads on the plain would be a higher priority. I suppose the hoons who display their prowess with burn-out road art will appreciate the illumination.

A. Borrie
Oamaru

100 YEARS AGO
FROM OUR ARCHIVES

Denmark fears NZ dairy exports

SOME interesting observations on the dairy industry were made by Mr W. Garrett, of Auckland, who returned by the Niagara after a business trip to the United States, England, and the Continent. The outstanding features he observed were the cleanliness of the milk supply in Denmark and the immense quantity of dairy produce used in the manufacture of ice cream in America.

He was interested to find in Copenhagen, where the quality of milk supplied to the cities was perhaps the highest in the world, that

necessary for New Zealand to keep pace; otherwise we would suffer.

St Agatha, protector of Sicily

From time immemorial the Sicilians have had resort to pious expedients to avert the wrath of Etna. It is reported that the peasants attributed the safety of Castiglione and Linguaglossa last week to St Egidio's pastoral staff which they planted in the path of the lava when it threatened these towns. It is significant, however, that, with less faith in supernatural influences, engineers worked desperately to see what more material safeguards, such as trenches, could accomplish. Moreover, the use of the pastoral staff has not prevented a renewal of the threat to Linguaglossa. It is, it seems, in an eleventh-hour miracle that the peasants are now reposing their faith. But it is St Agatha, a ruling force in Catania, that has the great reputation in Sicily as a protective agency against inroads of lava. It is recorded that at

the time of the eruption of the year 253 the inhabitants of that province first tested the efficacy of the veil of St Agatha which afterwards stood them in good stead, as they have believed, on many occasions. The saint had died in 251, and when the people saw the stream of lava approaching the city, she runs the story, they rushed to the tomb and removed the veil. This was carried to the edge of the descending torrent of lava and the tradition is that it once arrested its progress. The veil did not prevent the destruction of Catania in 1669, but this failure was attributed to the fact that the people were momentarily in disfavour with the saint. No doubt the faithful still have every confidence in the veil of St Agatha as a very powerful remedy against the destruction of their city in times of danger such as those of last week. Yet the volcano continues to do an immense amount of damage with its lava streams, despite the intervention of the saints. — editorial — ODT, 25.6.1923



A window display of New Zealand cheese at Bath, England. — Otago Witness, 28.8.1923
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