



SIG Research Strategy Workshop 5th March 2015 Report

Purpose A fresh chance to prepare for the future together by bringing together the various SIG research strategies and re-examining them collectively. We seek to identify opportunities for actions in the research space that will provide the greatest mutual benefit and a basis for engagement with the wider research sector.

Expected Outcome – Meaningful consensus on the key research messages and processes

Attendees See table at end

Key Points from Discussion:

1. Each Special Interest Group involved in using science should have a research strategy, although some SIGS could have combined strategies (e.g., LMF, LMG and Wastes & Contaminated Land). Currently there are new research strategies for most SIGS, although the Coastal research strategy is still in draft; the Natural Hazards research strategy has not been articulated (was absorbed in a MCDEM strategy process and never surfaced again).
2. There was some discussion that each strategy should follow a template, such as the Air Quality research strategy. But in reality, while the AQ strategy was the first developed, each subsequent SIG strategy developed its own system and this has led to the "roadmap" approach
3. The SIG strategies should be used to revise the Regional Council RS&T Strategy, but there should be a clear purpose in mind. The purpose of the 2011 Strategy was:

Purpose of the Strategy

This Strategy is not so much a document but a process that will catalyse and assist in the further development of high quality relevant research and timely and appropriate knowledge transfer mechanisms for the benefit of Regional and Unitary Councils.

The Strategy is owned by the Regional and Unitary Councils and in the first instance it has an internal focus. It provides a mechanism, or a Strategy Process, to get input from all Regional and Unitary Councils on Research, Science & Technology (RS&T)

priorities, promote greater collaboration, and enhance communication within the Local Government framework to ensure that good science supports the roles and functions of Regional and Unitary Councils. The Strategy Process also provides a unified and influential voice for Regional and Unitary Councils to communicate immediate and longer-term RS&T priorities to funding agencies and research providers. This will enable Regional and Unitary Councils to be acknowledged as a partner in setting research agendas and to have greater influence on RS&T investment and capability retention and development.

Is this Purpose still relevant? It was recommended that the next version of the RS&T Strategy highlights the commonalities between SIGS.

4. The revised RC RS&T Strategy should be communicated to Stephen Joyce (Minister) and Prue Williams endorsed this approach. More broadly, the workshop gave endorsement to the Science Advisory Group (SAG), and it was also mutually recognised as being incumbent upon every SIG, to be proactive in seeking to create and seize opportunities for engagement with the wider research funding and provisioning communities. This includes soliciting more funding for research (whether entirely under our own direction-EnviroLink- or as a reservoir we might tap into).
5. Maturanga Maori was identified as a topic that was absent in most SIG research strategies and needs to be developed.
6. Ecosystem Services (resource valuation) was identified as a topic of increasing importance for all SIGs, but perhaps one that was still not well understood by stakeholders and an area that needs greater capability.
7. There is a need to better understand the cost/benefits of any research or tool development proposed. We need to have an ongoing critical appraisal of the value of what we do/ what is done on our behalf- is the research delivering on its promise? Where are we getting greatest value for our research investment? Do we try to know everything about everything, as keen scientists, or stay choosey?
8. Resilience (social and ecological) research requires greater effort as does "forecasting" future trends that will impact on councils.
9. Communication and the role of "Citizen Science" were identified as key issues that needed to be developed both to ensure that research strategies were kept alive, but also to ensure greater community input and uptake. This is particularly important as NZ undergoes a significant change in population ethnicity mix as many new immigrants do not understand the importance of the environment etc. There are initiatives currently being taken to test the role of citizen science in assisting with research for councils and others. It is recognised that there is a lot that can be learned in this

area. Science is no longer just for the scientists: we have to socialise our science.¹

10. The workshop also recognised the need for more affordable tools that lead to greater cost-effective research and monitoring (“do it smarter and cheaper”). This is an area that needs to be promoted in all strategies and in the RC RS&T revised strategy.
11. SIGS need to ensure their strategies are kept alive by including the research strategy implementation as an agenda item for each meeting.
12. It was also noted that SIG convenors should ensure cross-SIG communication of research priorities to enable clearer signals to research providers and MBIE and collaboration in the development of new tools. This is not only about recognising that SIGs might share priorities in common, but actively and intentionally working across SIGs to ensure effective and efficient progress, avoiding duplication, and most of all recognising that the issue we face in the future are much more likely to be multi-dimensional and complex. A ‘silo’ mentality will no longer suffice to deliver a complete solution.
13. There was a mixed understanding of how well SIGS and councils have been linked to the development of the National Science Challenges and continued/enhanced communication is required in this area.
14. The Envirolink website could be used to promote greater communication but other means should be examined as well.
15. With regard to the question “What research priorities should councils be promoting to MBIE?” it was suggested that we run priority topics through a sieve, possibly using the Envirolink Tool evaluation criteria below (or an adapted version). Each SIG could do this for their priorities, and then the Science Advisory Group could facilitate a process to do this at a higher level. It was suggested that this exercise should be completed before the end of April 2015 (**Action**).

¹ Comment from Rob Smith - Under the item #9 Communication and Citizen Science there is the related theme of Capacity Enhancement - especially getting graduates and central government to understand the role and decision making process within the Unitary/Regional sector. Especially important given the new found desire to have NES and NPS tools developed. Many in MfE/MPI are of such recent tenure that they may struggle to understand the LG environment (some are excellent, some not so much). I wonder if this is a bit broader and covers existing RC staff and making good decisions and understanding that there may be unintended consequences of an action or that there are such things as ecological thresholds. Does this come under a separate ‘tools for management / decision making / horizon scanning’ theme? Actually this last bit probably fits a bit better under #8.

Envirolink Tool evaluation criteria

Criteria	Meaning	Score
Strategic fit	Relative to RS&T Strategy	1-4
Expression of support	From council voting	
Opportunity for RC to take a proactive position	For RC's to be effective	
Risk	Risk of not conducting the project	
Risk of not succeeding	For technical or social reasons	
Policy fit	RC policy	
Council responsibility	As opposed to central govt	
Total		

The higher the score the better
Scores out of 4 – for each category

Strategic fit = relative to RS&T Strategy
 Expression of support = from council voting
 Opportunity to be pro-active = i.e., for RC's to be effective
 Risk = i.e., risk of not conducting the project, does it need to be done soon?
 Risk of not succeeding- i.e., for technical or social reasons
 Policy fit = RC policy (also consider LAWA and EMAR fit)
 Council responsibility – as opposed to central govt

Other points that emerged during discussion (some of these might be relatively specific to a particular SIG):

16. NZ's general research capability and capacity is of concern because it is diminishing/not keeping up.
17. Time lag and cumulative effects are emerging as increasingly to be taken into account- e.g. whether it's the intricacies of the land-groundwater-surface water-coastal matrix, or human health impacts from chronic exposure, or changing river channels.
18. The social, economic, and cultural consequence and dimensions, not only of our 'problems', but also of our 'solutions', need to be incorporated. There are second order and unintended consequences that are not always recognised in the first instance.
19. We need to make sure we've got the question right, before we ask for answers (In the first instance this is being addressed in 15 above, but it's universally applicable)
20. Research, results, data, information need to recognise. uncertainty/lack of precision- that is, we need not only to acknowledge that science is not always exact, but we need

to have some sense of the confidence limits around the 'answers' we give; and we also need to be explicit around the limitations and applicability of what we are dealing with

Attendees		
Council	Rep	SIG rep from Council
NRC Auckland	Collin Dall	Jonathan Boow Richard Wood
Waikato Bay of Plenty	Eddie Grogan	Dominique Noiton Simon Stokes
Gisborne Hawkes Bay Taranaki	Iain Maxwell	Kath Kozniak Gary Bedford
Horizons Wellington	Graham S-J	Jeff Watson Abby Matthews Graeme Campbell John Drewry Megan Oliver Donna Hoyland
Nelson Marlborough Tasman West Coast Canterbury Otago Southland All Councils	Dean Evans Rob Smith Chris Ingle Ken Taylor Bill Dyck	Steve Markham Tim Davie Richard Bowman