



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.
PO Box 90 Nedlands WA 6009
www.afgw.org.au

22 January 2014

The Hon Tony Abbott
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Abbott,

Re. Science Funding

I am writing on behalf of the Australian Federation of Graduate Women to ask you to advocate for increases in science funding as the National Commission of Audits begins its deliberations. We support the views expressed in December by Professor Les Field of the Australian Academy of Science that Australia is not investing nearly enough in science.

AFGW is the national voice of graduate women working, since 1922, through initiatives in Education especially for the advancement and wellbeing of women and girls. Many of our members have successful careers in scientific fields. Our late member Professor Nancy Millis was a Fellow of the Academy and her work is so highly regarded that they have initiated a new award for women scholars in her honour. We have been concerned with enabling women and girls to develop skills especially in the less traditional fields and to take an active place in the workforce.

We note the concerns expressed by Professor Field about the regressive and reductive tendencies of this government which, while still supporting the primary school initiative of the Australian Academy of Science, shows little understanding of the connection of sustainability with individual subjects and which also ignores the necessity for the sustainability of research here in Australia. The decision by the Coalition government, not to have a separate Ministry of Science has been remarked on by many media commentators, both in Australia and internationally, as a most retrograde step.

For a nation of 23 million we have punched above our weight in so many ways but it has been achieved only by sustained investment by government. Cutting edge research is not done by companies but through the universities and research institutes. Consider what our CSIRO has achieved – in particular its work on wi-fi. Consider the nation's achievements in medicine and preventive health. That work must continue to be done by teams, by postgraduate students working with leading researchers. They must be enabled to see beyond

the narrow avenues of commercial applications to future possibilities. Your commitment to increased funding is vital to advancing Australia's quality of life and that of the wider world through scientific enquiry.

Linked with this is our concern that cutting scientific funding will limit the opportunities for our very best and brightest researches. Many of our members have family and friends who have settled permanently overseas because they have not been able to advance their careers in Australia. Many will never return and our nation will have lost their valuable contributions.

We are aware that you have set up the Commission of Audit as a much needed cost-cutting exercise. Do not cut off your nose to spite your face by undermining the scientific work of our universities and our major scientific institutes such as the CSIRO. Invest in the future of our children and our nation.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Madeleine M. Laming
President