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# Government and Science Policy

**Speaker: Brian Boyle**

**Summary from: Amanda Bauer, Leith Godfrey, Thibault Garel**

The main points from this session are:

- Read the Australian decadal plan and mid-term reviews in order to be familiar with the goals of the community.
- In order to get involved with science policy, follow the procedures of your organisation and join committees (e.g. Science Meets Parliament, National Committee of Astronomy, Science and Technology Australia, etc...)!
- In working with government, you must think carefully in response to questions. Provide advice, but stay away from policy commentary (unless you have a Nobel Prize). You can be visionary, but you must also be realistic. It is OK to say ‘I dont know’ and ask for clarification.

## **Summary:**

The discipline of astronomy enjoys a good relationship with, and is highly regarded by the Government, largely due to the fact that the astronomy community acts with unity, and there are not sections of the community “complaining.” Astronomy is well known for the ability to have a clear view and be well organised. Future interaction with the Government should seek to maintain, or enhance, this impression, and the good relationship that has been built up over more than 20 years. That means learning to “sing from the hymn sheet” in order to maintain unity, and develop well prepared business plans, as this minimises the risk for Government. One should understand the vision and science goals of the astronomical community in several years time, in order to communicate the policy and financial needs to achieve those goals. To do this, one should be familiar with the Decadal plan and mid-term reviews prepared by a committee of astronomers with feedback from the entire community.

**Governance.** Australian astronomical organizations depend on the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, which is comprised of four Ministers, among which the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research. This Minister is subdivided in specific departments (e.g. Research Infrastructure, Research Agencies, etc) which are in charge of the main scientific Australian organizations, like CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) , AAO (Australian Astronomical Observatory), ARC (Australian Research Council), for instance.

The budget process runs from July through May. This is the means to get new funding initiatives for astronomy, but proposals can be kicked out at any stage. Examples of funding initiatives are joining ESO, bid for SKA host, Australia-China joint research centre, Gemini membership, ASKAP, the Super Science Initiative, etc.

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**How does one get involved in science policy?** Follow the policy of your organization to get involved in government policy. Early career researchers are also eligible to be part of committees, and they are therefore encouraged to contact people in charge. Examples of potential committees are the AAL (Astronomy Australia Limited - RTAC, OTAC, AERAC), TACs, NCA (National Committee of Astronomy), ASA (ANITA, EPOC, WIA), Science and Technology Australia, Science Meets Parliament, Academy of Science. Astronomy is seen as very well organized in eyes of government and the other sciences and we should aim to keep this up!

**In working with members of government**, behave with trust and respect towards public servants. Remain proud of what you do as an astronomer and humble that people want to support it! Represent the decadal plan and midterm reviews in order to present a united front to the government (which Australian astronomers have established well!). On policy, one should provide advice, but not commentary (unless you have Nobel prize ;) “you should have done this” (commentary, in public) versus “you could do this” (advice). Never go beyond your brief, provide advice that has been asked for, but not more. Provide the vision, show how to implement and know risk level.

#### Select Quotes:

“It’s amazing what can be achieved when you don’t care who gets credit.”

“The most convincing argument is one that comprises equal measures of logos, ethos, pathos”  
- Socrates

“Vision without implementation is hallucination.” In other words, its great to have a vision, but you need to be able to back it up with a robust business plan.

“Diplomacy is the art of letting other people have your way”

“You didnt realize my former career was a porn star” - Brian Boyle

“Grit your teeth and remain pleasant.”

“know where the puck is going to be” – i.e, think forward

“Q- What’s the chance of detection of SETI?”

“A- Chance’s low, but potential impact is infinitely high...”

“Capability = skills, infrastructure and relationships.”

“There are rules, but they can be changed.”

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## ACRONYMS

RTAC	Radio Telescopes Advisory Committee
OTAC	Optical Telescopes Advisory Committee
AERAC	Astronomy eResearch Advisory Committee
TACs	Time Assignment Committees
ANITA	Australian National Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics
EPOC	Education and Public Outreach Committee
WIA	Women in Astronomy
NCA	National Committee of Astronomy

**Table 1:** *Non-exhaustive summary of committees in Australian Astronomy.*