



The Science Media Centre (SMC) is an independent source of expert comment and information for journalists covering science and technology in New Zealand. Our aim is to promote accurate, bias-free reporting on science and technology by helping the media work more closely with the scientific community.



TVNZ – One News

GARTH BRAY, 19 August 2009

Gardasil backed
despite side-effects



Publicaddress.net

RUSSELL BROWN, 2 June 2009

Swine flu, terror
and Susan Boyle



New Zealand Herald

JARROD BOOKER, 15 September 2009

'Water footprint' as pressing
as carbon dioxide emissions

Update from the SMC Manager

If recession, job losses, business closures and belt-tightening have defined the last year, it has also been one where science-related issues have kept an under-resourced media extremely busy.

There were the defining, long-running stories – the swine flu pandemic and the increasingly concerning updates from scientists on climate change.

Along the way, we also faced toxic beaches, a revival of the 1080 debate, polarising public health issues such as the fortification of bread with folic acid and scientifically-based challenges to New Zealand's export-orientated primary sector and clean green image.

It was in this environment that the Science Media Centre was born, by necessity establishing itself rapidly to become a trusted, responsive source of scientific information serving 350 journalists.

We worked on all of the stories mentioned above, but to do so, our tiny Wellington-based team had to first gain the trust of the country's scientists. In that endeavour, we have been successful, building a panel of scientific advisors and collaborating with experts from literally every research institution in the country on hundreds of alerts, science backgrounders and enquiries from journalists. Without the support of these scientists, the SMC could not exist.

We held 25 online briefings for journalists covering subjects as diverse as dietary supplements and the water footprint of agriculture. We operate truly transparently – all of our briefings are posted on the web as podcasts, all of our alerts are available for anyone to read.

We established Sciblogs, the largest science blog network in Australasia, to give scientists the opportunity to engage directly in science communication.

One of the highlights of our first 18 months of operation has been working with the more established Science Media Centres in Britain and Australia, who have welcomed the New Zealand SMC with open arms. Next year will see other SMCs emerge in Canada and Japan and an increasingly powerful global network that is committed to helping the media generate accurate, unbiased coverage of science-related issues.

The SMC has hit the ground running, but there is much work still to do to encourage the type of coverage of science society needs. We look forward to embracing this challenge in the years to come.



Peter Griffin, SMC MANAGER



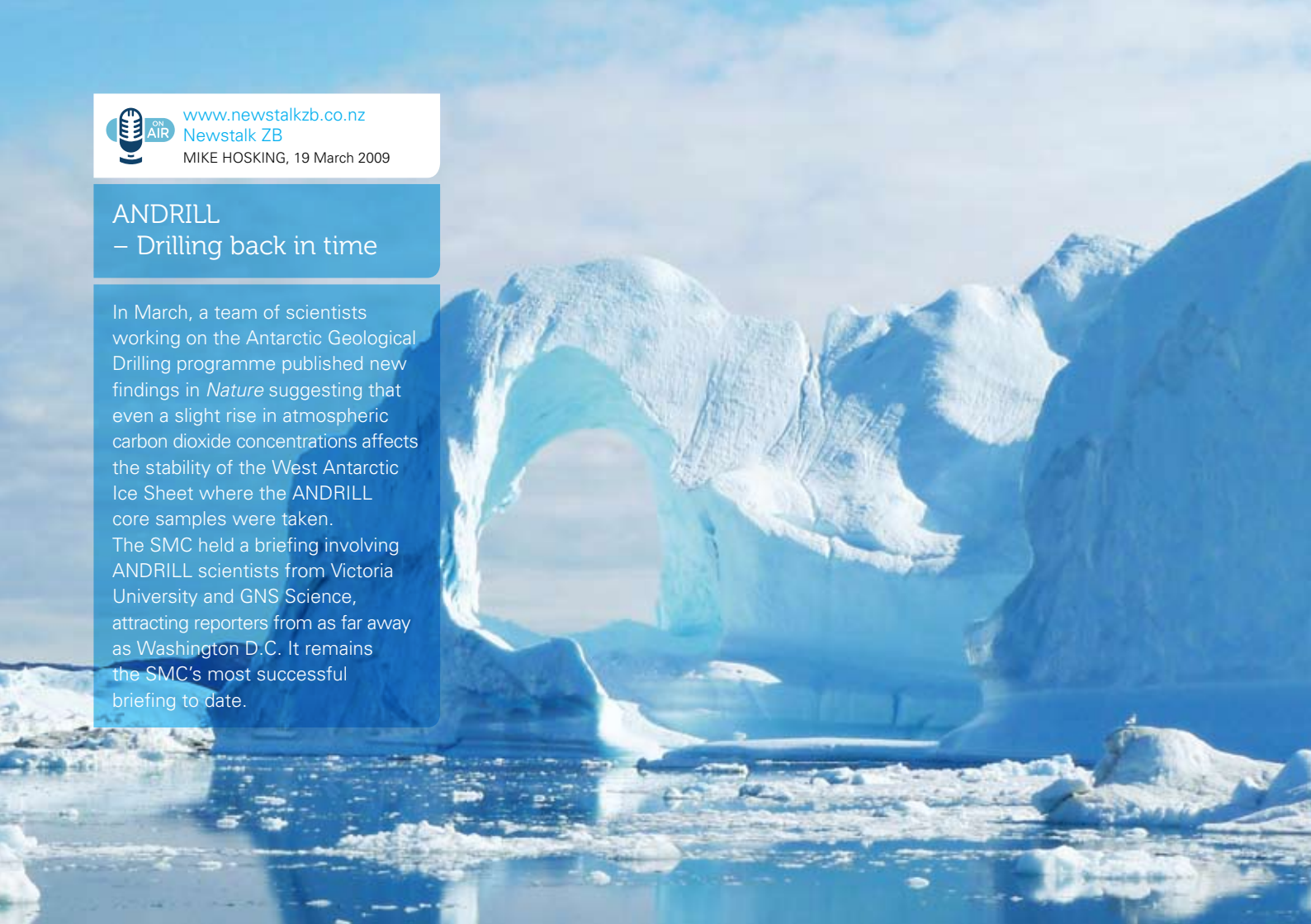
www.newstalkzb.co.nz
Newstalk ZB

MIKE HOSKING, 19 March 2009

ANDRILL – Drilling back in time

In March, a team of scientists working on the Antarctic Geological Drilling programme published new findings in *Nature* suggesting that even a slight rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations affects the stability of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet where the ANDRILL core samples were taken.

The SMC held a briefing involving ANDRILL scientists from Victoria University and GNS Science, attracting reporters from as far away as Washington D.C. It remains the SMC's most successful briefing to date.



Working with journalists

New Zealand has very few science journalists, so the SMC mainly deals with general reporters keen to get their teeth into the science-related issue of the day.

Our media database, therefore, is incredibly diverse – with 350 journalists signed up to receive our SMC alerts and 150 registered to receive our weekly Research Radar, which features embargoed research due to be published in the top scientific journals.

A media query can be as simple as a reporter seeking out the contact details of an expert or as complex as helping a media organisation assemble its annual list of the best scientists in the country. No query is too trivial or too complicated for us to tackle.

The diversity of the audience the SMC deals with means each query is unique. The needs of journalists vary greatly, whether they are working in print or TV, radio or online. But no matter what the nature of the query is, journalists come to the SMC for fast access to unbiased, factual information and expert contacts who can be relied on to deliver useful and accurate information.

The SMC, in conjunction with Meltwater News, tracks media coverage of science-related issues on a month-by-month basis, creating the first set of analytics focused on science coverage. These statistics (see pages 6 and 7) are published on the Science Media Centre website.



One of the biggest challenges a journalist faces – particularly one just starting out – is finding people to go to for reliable, honest and straightforward opinions. So thank God for the SMC – any time I've needed to find informed people, I've been able to turn to the SMC team and know that whoever they point me towards will not only know what they are talking about but will be an asset to my story.

Imogen Neale REPORTER
Papakura Courier



The Science Media Centre is a great organisation; they provide up-to-the-minute news on developments in the world of science and technology and offer in-depth analysis that is easy to follow and comprehend.

Hamish Fletcher PRESENTER
The Wire, bFM



Working with scientists

The work of the SMC would not be possible without the support of the country's scientists who devote time and energy to contribute to our SMC alerts and background briefings and who agree to front up to the media – usually at short notice.

The SMC has forged lasting relationships with scientists across the CRIs, universities and private research organisations and across all fields of science. Aiding this has been our Science Advisory Panel, a group of 30 scientists who advise the SMC on their areas of expertise and who are surveyed monthly for their views on coverage of science in the media.

In its short life, the SMC has developed what may well be the most comprehensive database of scientific contacts in the country, a resource the media is constantly drawing on.

Early on, the SMC identified a desire among scientists to brush up on their science communication skills. As a result, the SMC has conducted seminars for established and emerging scientists and research managers around the country, to give them fresh ideas and skills to employ when dealing with the media.

For the last two years, the SMC has overseen the judging of the New Zealand Association of Scientists' Science Communicator Award, which was won this year by Professor Ian Shaw of the University of Canterbury.



In planning coverage of BioED, we were helped greatly through the services of the Science Media Centre, not only for introductions to media outlets, but also for assistance in developing the media plan that was used for the conference. Please pass on my gratitude to the rest of your staff for a job well done.



Professor Peter Lockhart ALLAN WILSON CENTRE
Massey University



Scientists and journalists at an SMC briefing in Wellington held in conjunction with UNESCO and Sustainability Aotearoa New Zealand. CREDIT Nakedize

The next generation

New Zealand needs to nurture not only the next generation of scientists, but the fledgling journalists who will help improve the public's understanding of science through reporting on science-related issues.

As such, the SMC devotes considerable resources to working with emerging scientists and also with journalism schools.

The SMC receives a large number of media enquiries from student journalists representing the likes of *Te Waha Nui*, AUT's student newspaper, and University of Auckland radio station bFM.

Throughout the year, SMC staff have held workshops and given lectures on science communication issues at institutions across the country.

In July, the SMC participated in a roadshow undertaken by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology, the Royal Society of New Zealand and Immigration New Zealand, reaching hundreds of young scientists and teaching them basic skills in science communication.

In conjunction with the SMC, the Journalists Training Organisation is contributing towards a workplace training module for journalists that will cover the basics of science reporting – everything from explaining the peer-review process through to communicating risky subjects in soundbites. The SMC intern programme saw students from Massey University and the Malaghan Institute of Medical Research undertake work experience at the SMC during the year.



From the perspective of a journalism educator, it is invaluable to have Peter Griffin's input as a science communicator and a former journalist. He sparked our students' interest in a workshop he gave at the Broadcasting School, and they will continue to work with the SMC as they hone their journalism skills.



Jos Darling JOURNALISM TUTOR
New Zealand Broadcasting School



Undertaking work experience at the Science Media Centre gave me a behind-the-scenes look at how science stories come together and allowed me to work on topical issues like 1080 poisoning. As someone interested in pursuing a career in science communication, my connection with the SMC has been invaluable, both in terms of the journalism I have undertaken and in giving me an idea of what makes for effective science communication.



Motoko Kakubayashi
GRADUATE IN PHYSICS AND JOURNALISM
Massey University

SMC at a glance

Media breakdown

Who uses the SMC?



- Newspapers 27%
- Magazines 24%
- Radio 21%
- Television 17%
- Agencies 05%
- Blogs/online 04%

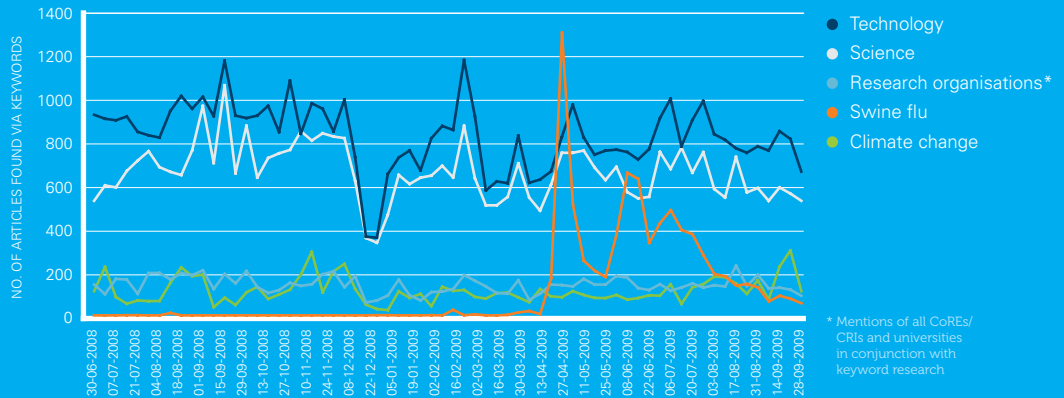
Progress so far – June 08 to June 09

Some key statistics to show the extent of SMC activity in the last year.



SMC Media Tracker

Metatopics 1 June 2008 – 30 September 2009



* Mentions of all CoREs/CRIs and universities in conjunction with keyword research

360

JOURNALISTS
WITH ACCESS
TO SMC ALERTS

460

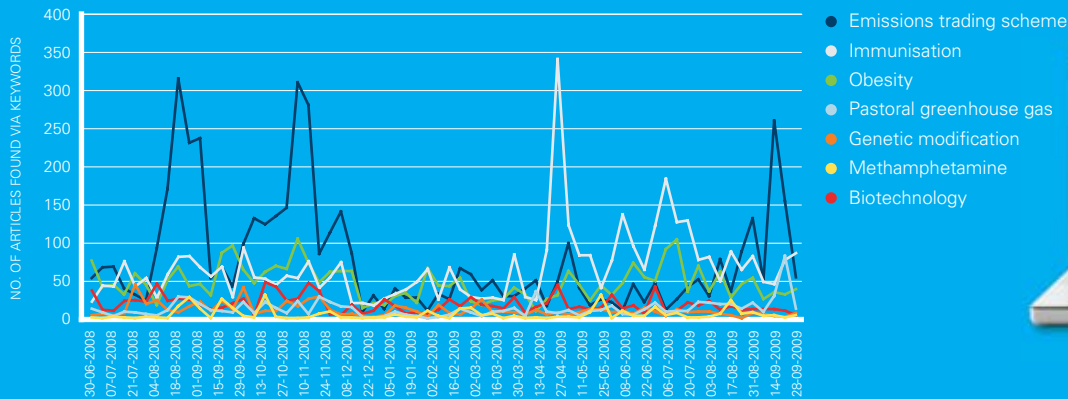
SCIENTIFIC PAPERS
DOWNLOADED
FROM THE SMC
RESOURCE LIBRARY

43,210

SMC ALERT AND
HEADS UP
NEWSLETTER
EMAILS SENT

SMC Media Tracker

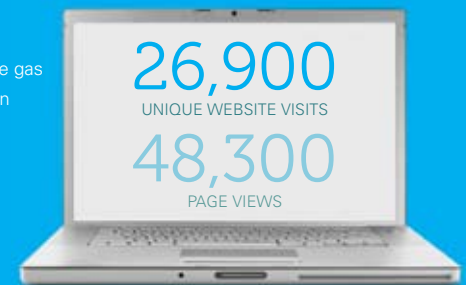
Topics 1 June 2008 – 30 September 2009



Source: Meltwater News

Web traffic

Since 1 June 2008





www.odt.co.nz
Otago Daily Times
NZPA, 28 July 2009

Tree planting urged to mitigate emissions

When the government announced its 2020 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target in July, the SMC teamed up with University of Canterbury researchers Associate Professor Euan Mason and Senior Lecturer David Evison to examine the role of forestry in cutting emissions. The two academics released the first significant study looking at the treatment of forestry under the revised emissions trading scheme, and their work was widely quoted in the media.

SMC alerts and backgrounders

The SMC alerts we issue are the bread and butter of the Science Media Centre.

Since our first release on climate change in July 2008, we have issued 350 alerts, quoting over 500 scientists from New Zealand and abroad. The alerts are press releases – but with a difference.

They include explanatory quotes from scientists on new research or breaking news stories and serve as useful reference sheets for journalists working on deadline.

We do not attempt to spin the science, just present as wide a range of views as possible from scientists on an issue.

SMC alerts and background fact sheets have covered everything from October's tsunami in the Samoan islands and the prospects for geoengineering schemes, through to high-caffeine energy drinks and the HPV immunisation programme.

Our alerts on swine flu, folic acid fortification of bread, forestry's treatment under the emissions trading scheme and ocean acidification have generated hundreds of media stories.



VISIT THE SMC WEBSITE
TO VIEW ALL PAST ALERTS:
www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz



As a producer of a news and current affairs radio show, I am always looking for relevant and interesting stories. The Science Media Centre is the go-to place to locate New Zealand's best and relevant science media people. They also provide an excellent email alert service highlighting topical science stories. The SMC has become my first port of call to locate the people I need. The team appreciates the timeframe constraints under which we work in the media and delivers on every request. I'm positive their work means more science stories appear in the mainstream media.



Mark Wilson PRODUCER
Radio Live

Key briefings

Outside of the political and police reporting beats, press conferences in New Zealand are rare.

Journalists are spread around the country and are under pressure to produce stories to tight deadlines.

Taking an hour out to attend a press conference, therefore, is a major undertaking for a time-poor journalist.

As such, when the SMC kicked off its scientific briefings in late 2008, it decided to take advantage of the most efficient tool for bringing people together – the internet. The ongoing SMC Online Briefing series allows journalists to dial in from their desks to listen to scientists talk on topics in their areas of expertise as they present slide presentations via the web.

The briefings are recorded and posted on the SMC website as podcasts, while associated research papers

and presentations are made available in the SMC Resource Library for download by registered journalists.

Some of the briefings are time-sensitive, focusing on new research about to be published or topical science-related issues that are already drawing the media's attention but require closer investigation.

Others are presented in the form of backgrounders for reporters, allowing them to improve their knowledge of issues and make contacts in the scientific community.

Between 5 and 20 journalists generally take part in SMC Online Briefings, which are developing as a major driver of SMC-originated stories appearing in the media. Over the next year, the SMC will increase the frequency of its briefings, some of which are held jointly with the Australian Science Media Centre.



The SMC ran a very effective webcast for two of our scientists who had a paper in the journal *Nature* on Antarctic science. It was an interactive internet session with the scientists running through the presentation and journalists asking questions.



John Callan COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER
GNS Science



The SMC updates are a great way to keep up with current research, helpfully summarising scientific journal articles that I might never have laid eyes on otherwise. Their ability to quickly round up comments on breaking stories is always handy for a busy journalist.



Eloise Gibson ENVIRONMENT REPORTER
New Zealand Herald

Paracetamol and asthma

Dr Richard Beasley's important research into the link between paracetamol consumption among young children and their risk of developing asthma as a result of such use received close attention when the findings were featured in *The Lancet*. The SMC helped coordinate local coverage of the research, holding an online briefing with Dr Beasley in conjunction with the Australian Science Media Centre. Coverage was featured around the world.

The bovine genome

When *Science* announced on its cover the sequencing of the cow genome and the benefits already being realised from this long-running piece of research, the SMC gathered together AgResearch scientists who had been involved in the project to take journalists through the details. Subsequent stories featured prominently in the agricultural press and mainstream publications.

Immunisation

New Zealand's relatively low rate of immunisation among children was highlighted in UNICEF'S *State of the World's Children* report. The SMC explored some of the reasons for lingering resistance to immunisation in a briefing involving immunisation experts Dr Nikki Turner and Professor Michael Baker.

ANDRILL findings

The SMC's most successful briefing to date drew together scientists from Victoria University and GNS Science to discuss findings from the ANDRILL ice core drilling project underway in Antarctica. The briefing was attended by journalists as far away as Sydney and Washington D.C.

Methane emissions

New Zealand's approach to tackling methane emissions from agriculture was in the spotlight in a briefing held in partnership with the Pastoral Greenhouse Gas Research Consortium. The briefing is one of several the SMC ran in the lead-up to the Copenhagen climate negotiations.

Methamphetamine

Is banning pseudoephedrine in cold medicine the answer to our methamphetamine problem? The SMC examined this issue in an online briefing bringing together some of the country's top experts in methamphetamine use and manufacture and held the briefing to coincide with the release of Chief Science Advisor Professor Sir Peter Gluckman's report to the Prime Minister on the issue.

Food miles

The contentious issue of food miles was discussed in an SMC briefing featuring Lincoln University's Professor Caroline Saunders and John Ballingall of the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research. The briefing examined new NZIER research quantifying the drop in GDP New Zealand could experience if consumers in European markets decide to increasingly buy locally grown produce.



www.listener.co.nz
New Zealand Listener

SARAH BARNETT, 27 June 2009

Swine flu – man v virus

From the moment the Rangitoto College students returned to New Zealand with suspected cases of the H1N1 virus, the SMC was on the case, rounding up comment from experts locally and drawing on scientists from the SMC networks in Britain and Australia. Swine flu constituted the biggest single story of the year in terms of media enquiries to the SMC.

Sciblogs – Australasia’s largest science blogging network

In September, the Science Media Centre launched Sciblogs.co.nz, a platform for scientists to write about their areas of expertise and receive feedback from readers.

Sciblogs has quickly become the main online hub for discussion of science-related issues in New Zealand. It started with 25 scientists covering everything from clinical health to climate change and has already expanded to cover areas as diverse as forensics and future food science.

The website, which also combines video and audio clips and social media tools, was developed to give scientists an opportunity to engage in science communication. It is a tool for all scientists who want to hone their skills in writing for a mainstream audience and is already giving dozens of scientists greater confidence in engaging in explaining the big issues related to their area of science. Sciblogs is also feeding mainstream media coverage of science, serving as a valuable resource for journalists.

30
BLOGGERS

800
ARTICLES POSTED

12,000
VISITORS PER MONTH

sciblogs.co.nz



Science Media Centre

The SMC is an independent centre established by the Royal Society of New Zealand with funding from the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology. It is overseen by a five-member advisory board made up of representatives from the media and science and draws on the expertise of 30 scientists through its Science Advisory Panel. The SMC maintains one of the largest and most comprehensive expert databases of scientific contacts in the country.

Advisory Board

Vincent Heeringa CHAIR
Publisher, HB Media

Margaret Austin CNZM
Royal Society Councillor

Professor Jean Fleming
Professor of Science Communications,
University of Otago

Anthony Scott
Chief Executive, Science New Zealand

Clive Lind
Editorial Development Manager,
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