
Obituary

*Sir Malcolm Kenneth McIntosh
AC Kt PhD
Class 2/72*

A Driving Force in Science Policy



Sir Malcolm McIntosh AC Kt PhD, was Chief of Procurement in the UK Ministry of Defence from 1991-5 and Chief Executive of Australia's national science agency, CSIRO, from 1996 to 2000. He died on February 7, 2000, following treatment for cancer.

Malcolm Kenneth McIntosh was born on 14 December 1945 in Melbourne. During his distinguished public service he drew attention to the role that science and technology play as major driving forces in a modern economy.

He was also strongly committed to building Australia's capability for basic knowledge-winning scientific research.

A physics graduate from The Australian National University, Dr McIntosh began his career in the Weapons Research Establishment in Salisbury, South Australia. After two years national service in which he rose to the rank of Major, he joined the Australian Department of Defence.

Dr McIntosh's employment in the public service took him to the Department of Labour and Immigration, the Industries Assistance Commission, the 1979 Myers inquiry into technological change and thence to the post of Deputy Secretary for Defence, responsible for procurement. He then became permanent head of the Department of Industry Technology and Commerce.

In 1991 the British Government recruited him to be Chief of Procurement for the Ministry of Defence, where he was responsible, among other things, for Britain's nuclear weapons program, the Eurofighter, Trident missile and Challenger MK11 tank programs. In 1996 his singular contribution was recognised in a knighthood.

Dr McIntosh joined Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation as Chief Executive in February, 1996, and piloted the national science agency through a series of organisational and budgetary shoals. He oversaw the introduction of a new structure that brought the agency into closer partnership with its customers in industry.

In a remarkable display of courage and tenacity, Dr McIntosh held the post of CSIRO Chief Executive and played a leading role in Australia's national debate on innovation for four years after both his kidneys were removed following a cancer diagnosis in 1995.

He was a member of Australia's Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (AATSE).

He chaired a management review of Australia's Department of Defence in 1997 and in 1999 reviewed the Collins Class Submarine project, all without diminishing his performance as CSIRO's Chief Executive.

He emphasised the need for both Australia and CSIRO to maintain their commitment to strategic, knowledge-gathering science as a vital first-step in delivering useful applied research to industry. Industry, in turn, has become more receptive.

In 1999, he received Australia's highest honour, being made a Companion in the Order of Australia in recognition of his "major contribution to the development of Australia's scientific and technological research and public awareness of the need for science".

The Australian honour crowned a career in public service, which was also recognised in the award of a British Knighthood and the US Department of Defence Medal for Distinguished Public Service.

During this time as Chief Executive in 1996 Dr McIntosh presided over a major organisational restructure in CSIRO, the reshaping of the agency's science effort for the 21st century and the building of closer ties between science and industry.

He believed strongly in the importance of Australia becoming a more scientifically aware society, and in scientists sharing their insights and discoveries with the community at all levels.

He felt that it was important for Australians to see the benefits of their investment in R&D, and for them to understand better the value which science contributes to our economy, society and environment. This would help us, collectively, to take better decisions about our future, he once said.

He was proud of Australia's improving record in putting research to use.

In one of his last public engagements he said, "Australia really is doing its own science and technology across the board.

"This is no longer a country that imports science and technology, often second best, and then tries to adapt it, often not particularly well, to Australia's circumstances. Certainly, as a country that does only some two to four per cent of the world's R&D, we can't expect to do everything in Australia and it would be silly to try.

"But we certainly have demonstrated that by picking niches, by leapfrogging over the work that other people have done, and again, by adapting things to Australia's circumstances, we can be genuinely competitive in the world with our science and technology and therefore in those industries which choose to use that science and technology."

He encouraged talented young Australians to seek careers that add to our knowledge and understanding of the world we live in.

In his time at CSIRO, he won enormous loyalty and affection from the staff, and from those with whom he worked. He was a man with the highest sense of duty.

CSIRO Chairman Charles Allen said, "He will be remembered as one of the significant architects of Australian science policy at the dawn of the 21st Century.

"His contribution will have a profound and long-lasting effect, not just on CSIRO, but on innovation generally in this country."

Sir Malcolm is survived by his wife Margaret, and four children, Stuart, James, Lucy and Charles.

A memorial service was to be held in Canberra on March 8, 2000. ✖