

SCIENTISTS' COMMUNICATION WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC
— AN AUSTRALIAN SURVEY

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DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where reference is made in the text.

Suzette D. Searle

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes the communication activities and views of Australia's scientists around their communication with the general public. This exploratory research is based upon a national Internet survey of 1,521 Australian scientists who worked across public and private sectors for eight different types of employers and in seven science disciplines. The scientists were aged between 21 and 67+ years and the survey population was representative of the sex-age distribution of scientists in Australia in 2006.

This study sought to find out if scientists in Australia agreed that they had a responsibility to communicate with the general public, how personally important it was to them, and if there were any benefits for them from doing so. A significant finding of this research is that a large number of scientists have positive feelings about themselves, their communication and their work, as a benefit of communicating with the general public.

Whether communicating with the general public was a part of their job, or otherwise recognised or rewarded, and what scientists did to communicate with the general public is also explored. Hindrances to their communication and areas for improvement are identified. The influence of scientists' sex, age, discipline and employer upon their communication activities and views is analysed. Recommendations for improvement of communication practice are made.

Keywords: scientist, science communication, Australia, survey, age, sex, discipline, employer, generation