

Strategic Directions

for ISCAST

CHRISTIANS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

January 2015 Update



Introduction

The importance of ISCAST's vision and mission is being confirmed daily. The false premise that science and religion (especially Christianity) are not compatible dominates public discourse. ISCAST rejects this myth.

There is also considerable public suspicion about where science is taking us and what it is demanding of us. Genetically modified crops, DNA manipulation, and climate science join older public concerns such as atomic research and nuclear energy.

These issues take us beyond science and are shaped by questions of purpose, values, and meanings, which are so entrenched in our culture that we are hardly aware of them. As Christians who are scientists we draw deeply on the Christian tradition, and this shapes and directs our scientific pursuit.

We are convinced of the need for serious dialogue between science, the arts, religion, history, philosophy, and other cultural pursuits, in order to discover and draw upon the wisdom in the world. This dialogue contributes to our understanding of science, where its discoveries might lead, and, ultimately, how our society makes use of these.

As an institute of scientists and academics, ISCAST is deeply engaged in exploring how Christianity and science inform each other to the benefit of our understanding of both and for the benefit of humankind.

This report expands on this vision and how far we have progressed. It also invites you to join our quest—one that is important but also enjoyable and enriching—as we seek to follow the example of Jesus Christ and listen to brothers and sisters, often with different perspectives to ours, in a theological and academic safe space.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Gijsbers', written over a horizontal line.

Alan Gijsbers
President, ISCAST



Our Vision

A healthy interactive relationship between science and Christianity within the Australasian community.

Our Mission

To develop and advocate a Christian perspective in the science-religion dialogue within the science community, the Christian community and society generally in Australasia, and internationally.



Our Core Values

Christian commitment

- » We affirm the Gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Bible and outlined in the Nicene Creed as central to our faith.

Scientific commitment

- » We are committed to scientific and technological research; particularly the insight this gives to our understanding of our creator and the benefits it brings to our planet and humanity.

Biblical interpretation

- » We seek to interpret the Bible within the mainstream evangelical tradition while respecting the stance of others.

Moral accountability

- » We are committed to understanding and working within the limits of human knowledge, and seek to maximise the benefits and minimise the adverse impacts of the application of our science and technology.

Theological safe space

- » We will encourage people to be free to explore new areas of understanding without fear of unfair or inappropriate criticism or theological ostracism.

Mode of debate

- » We seek to speak the truth in love and firm humility while being open to new ways of thinking and without rejecting the insights of the past.



ISCAST Serves...



Our members

- » Christians and scientists in their daily work, particularly as it relates to the scientific enterprise

The Church

- » Local church communities
- » Theological colleges and degree-awarding bodies
- » Christian/church schools
- » Church governing bodies
- » Christian organisations and groups

The Australasian community

- » The scientific community
- » Government and non-government bodies
- » Opinion makers (the press, community blogs, etc.)
- » Students in universities and colleges
- » Government schools

ISCAST also has links with the international science-faith community including:

- » The American Scientific Affiliation
- » The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion
- » Christians in Science
- » The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences
- » The Biologos Forum



Our Strategic Priorities

The following priorities emerged from the 2011 Strategic Plan:

Appoint an Executive Project Officer

Rev. Chris Mulherin commenced work in March 2014. His position has three priorities:

- » To build up the chapters
- » To establish strategic links with related organisations
- » To extend ISCAST's communication function through the website, social media, and relations with secular and Christian media

Regenerate and broaden our agenda and membership

The board is concerned that women, students, and non-Caucasians are under-represented in our membership. Historically this may be due in part to the topics explored at ISCAST conferences and meetings. We are broadening the agenda to include areas of science that have not been traditionally explored by ISCAST (e.g. third world development, 'wicked problems', and translational research¹). The board is also keen to expand ISCAST's activities into the Asia-Pacific region.

Establish and strengthen existing links with related groups and organisations

Our mission, vision and core values call ISCAST to facilitate constructive collaboration and partnership with other like-minded organisations. In a spirit of servant leadership we seek to create cooperative links to enable others to flourish, and to enhance a mature science-religion dialogue throughout the region.

We are glad to provide resources, including the expertise of experienced scientists, philosophers, theologians, and educationalists, in order to serve other groups addressing similar issues.

We aim to be a catalyst not an empire builder, fostering mutual support through networks characterised by openness and trust.

Revitalise the Communications Working Group

The CWG was set up to establish the ISCAST website (funded through a grant from the John Templeton Foundation). The project included rationalising our publications to produce the *ISCAST Digest* and the online journal: *Christian Perspectives on Science and Christianity (CPOSAT)*. Having completed these tasks we have a renewed agenda, which includes supporting the CPOSAT editorial committee, developing a separate CPOSAT website, and taking advantage of social media including Twitter and Facebook.

¹ *Translational research explores the ways in which scientific concepts and discoveries can be incorporated into public policy and so lead to specific outcomes within the community.*



Develop a travelling fellows program

In order to spread ISCAST scholarship around Australia, particularly to regional areas, visits have been made to Brisbane, Wagga Wagga, Sydney, Bathurst, and Gippsland. Expanding this program depends not only on scholars being available but also on local people inviting speakers and organising events. Funding is set aside to facilitate this.

Develop an Australian science and religion research program

Implicit in the ISCAST Vision, Mission, and Core Values is the belief that Christianity has much to contribute to the scientific endeavour, as does science to our theological reflection. This is to the benefit of Christians, the Church, and our community. There is enormous scope for Christian perspectives to be salt, light, and leaven in an international community struggling to deal with the advances of science and technology.

To this end, for over 20 years, ISCAST has run the biennial Conference on Science and Christianity (COSAC) where, within a theological and academic safe space, scientists, professionals, theologians, philosophers, and others are encouraged to reflect on the challenges arising from their work-faith relationship.

ISCAST chapters are encouraged to explore topics that affect our professional lives and the website makes our thinking on these matters accessible to all.

The research that is required for this is difficult and expensive. Up until now, that activity has been ad hoc and focussed largely on papers presented at COSAC, often by ISCAST members reflecting on their own daily work and the challenges that arise in the light of their faith. Ideally ISCAST would be in a position to specifically commission research papers.

Explore and cultivate funding options

Our aspirations are expensive. We have a number of funding sources including membership fees, donations, events, and grants from funding agencies such as the Australian Research Theology Foundation Inc. and the John Templeton Foundation.

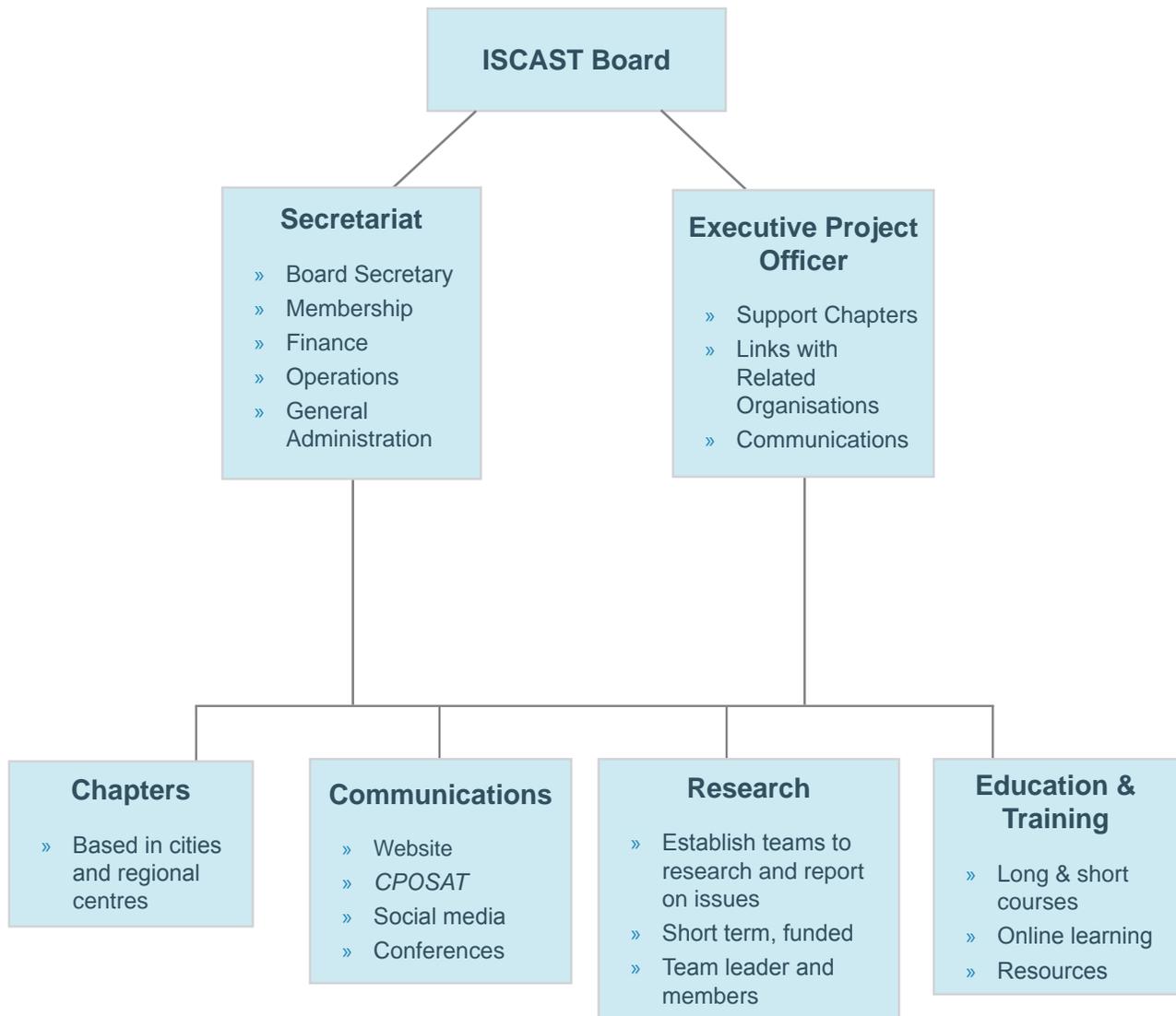
ISCAST also manages a bequest endowed by its founder, Prof. Lawrie Lyons. The fund is used to provide scholarships but is also available for other initiatives that relate to our purpose of studying Christianity in an age of science and technology.

Donations to fund the work of the Executive Project Officer have been generous; the board is grateful to ISCAST members for their support in confirming God's will in this initiative.

Develop a recruiting program

We have set a goal to double our membership from the 2014 level. In particular we aim to reach younger scientists and Christian thinkers, and help them in preparing to tackle tomorrow's issues after the current generation has moved on.

Our Corporate Structure



ISCAST and the Coalface

While ISCAST is a national organisation, much of the activity happens in local chapters. ISCAST expects that each chapter will develop its own thinking on the questions that confront it. We acknowledge the struggle of how our faith informs the complex issues of practising our science well. This issue is even more acute when individuals step outside their particular disciplines and attempt to integrate their science with their faith. However this complexity is not just at the interface between science and theology; it is also between the sciences themselves and the relation of those sciences to the cultural milieu in which they are being conducted. Underlying these challenges are our values, our worldviews, and the inarticulate stories, which shape the direction of our research and the direction of our society.

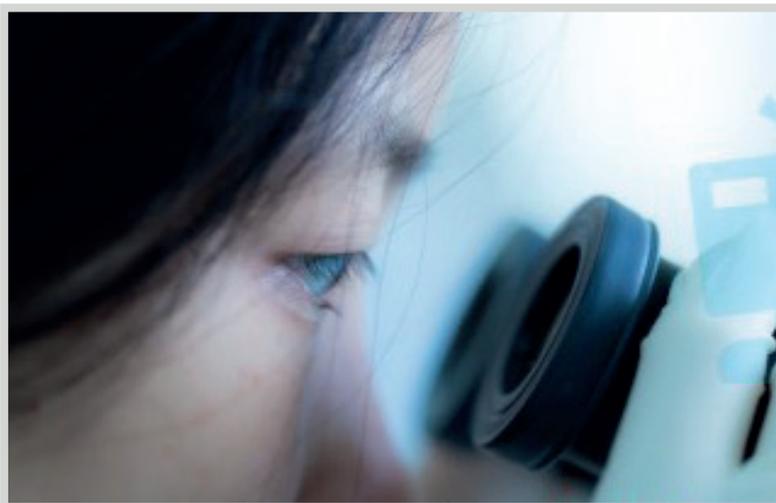
The problems this complexity brings have been termed 'wicked' or 'complex'. A wide range of stakeholders are affected, and the problems have multiple facets that affect different people differently. As a rule, there is no universal solution or 'stopping point' and we are often asked to implement solutions with incomplete data.

ISCAST looks to its local chapters to raise and explore such issues. Considering them in a trusted environment opens us all to thinking more broadly.

Local ISCAST chapters promote discussion and research in various ways:

- » Meetings for presentations and discussion
- » Informal research
- » Social media interchange
- » Opinion pieces in *CPOSAT*
- » Papers refereed and published formally in *CPOSAT*, in *Science and Christian Belief* or elsewhere.

In addition public lectures, conferences (in particular COSAC), formal research, and special interest groups complement the chapter-based explorations.



What Next?

In the short term the priorities of ISCAST are:

- » Build up the chapters
- » Explore funding opportunities
- » Revitalise and broaden our communication program
- » Double our membership from 2014 levels
- » Extend the part-time employment of the EPO to at least two days per week
- » Establish an active and viable research program
- » Explore the potential of an Asia/Pacific ISCAST to extend our fellowship beyond Australia and New Zealand.





ISCAST

Currently **ISCAST** has chapters and contacts located in:



We also have fellowship with colleagues in New Zealand, the UK, and the USA.

Contact Us

Do you want to join us?

If you would like to join ISCAST and be part of the crucial dialogue around science and religion, please contact the ISCAST office or find us online at www.iscast.org

Contact the **ISCAST** office:

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