

CSIR media release: Dr Anthony Turton

For immediate release - 27 November 2008

1. Dr Turton was invited to serve as one of 10 keynote speakers at our recent conference. For this, he prepared two items:
 - A written **PAPER** - which is included in the conference proceedings, and which was circulated beyond the CSIR in the weeks before the conference
 - A slide **PRESENTATION** for overhead display, which was withdrawn for reasons given below.
2. The CSIR did not 'gag' Dr Turton.
3. Dr Turton was suspended for inappropriate statements made to the media.
4. The CSIR will be engaging with Dr Turton to resolve the matter. However, we shall not conduct such engagement in the media.

The CSIR has a duty and a right to protect the image of the organisation. This applies to the quality and content of publications and presentations made in the name of the CSIR.

The presentation submitted on 14 November departed substantially from the written paper that had been circulated previously. The CSIR Executive deemed the presentation to be unsuitable and instructed it to be withdrawn because:

- The 'packaging' of the content included inappropriate visual material such as graphic pictures of execution by 'necklacing'. This would have portrayed the CSIR as being insensitive to the victims and the audience;
- Poor demonstration of links between cause and effect - for example the depiction of an unfortunate child with birth defects in several pictures, the statement that she lived in an area affected by mining waste, and making strong inference from a single data point. The slide concludes with a question as to whether this was caused by ingestion of contaminated clay by the mother at the time of pregnancy.

Unfortunately, Dr Turton chose not to use the organisational processes to raise a grievance about his presentation being withdrawn. Instead, he made inappropriate statements to the media. These statements are deemed by the CSIR to have brought it into disrepute and led to his suspension pending an investigation. He subsequently made further statements to the press, which gave the impression that the CSIR is suppressing debate on the issues of water, despite his written paper being available on the CSIR web site (www.csir.co.za).

The CSIR recognises that there are very serious and urgent issues facing water resource managers in South Africa. The concerns raised by Dr Turton in his paper, which remains in the public domain, are not new opinions. In the past, these issues have been raised by CSIR researchers, including Dr Turton, in a number of forums – from government to public platforms. These include three presentations to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Water Affairs and Forestry, as far back as 2006. These presentations are in the public domain.

END

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