

PRESS RELEASE

Friday 17 July 2009. For immediate release

A Vision for Earth System Research: Have Your Say

Paris, France—The International Council for Science (ICSU) has launched an online consultation to gather questions that will help direct the future of Earth system research. ICSU invites the scientific community—natural and social scientists—as well as technology experts, decision-makers, and the general public, to contribute by visiting <http://visioning.icsu.org>, until 15 August 2009.

The online consultation marks the beginning of the Earth System Visioning Process, which aims to develop an integrated research approach to the Earth system and its coordination.

The questions gathered from the consultation will be distilled into a draft research strategy by a group of experts before going back to the science community for comment.

‘Consultation is the key to the process if it is to identify the most pressing research priorities and have a far-reaching influence on the future of Earth system research’, said Dr Walter Reid, chair of the ICSU Earth System Visioning Task Group.

‘We want a well-rounded global perspective, from across the breadth of science. We are also encouraging early-career researchers to participate—they will play an important role in shaping Earth system research over the coming decades.’

Over the past quarter century, Earth system research has grown with the development of four major global environmental change programmes—the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), the International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP), DIVERSITAS—and the Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP).

The scientific research coming out of these programmes has provided results which help underpin assessments, including those conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and has had a major impact on regional and national science and policy agendas. The research has revealed the urgency and magnitude of the challenges for humankind in addressing global environmental change and human well-being.

However, the current research structures do not provide the integrated approach required to answer the most pressing societal issues—protecting the planet and ensuring sustainable human development.

‘Recent reviews of WCRP, IGBP and ESSP concluded that Earth system research needs better coordination and recommended that ICSU and partners explore how to do it. This Visioning Process will identify what needs to be done and how it should be carried out’, said Dr Reid.

‘There is an urgent need and a unique window of opportunity to engage, promote, and develop Earth system research for the benefit of society’, said Dr Reid. ‘This online consultation is the first step towards meeting that need.’

To take part in the consultation, visit <http://visioning.icsu.org>. Participants can post research questions, provide comments and vote on questions submitted by others. The online consultation closes on 15 August 2009 at midnight (Central European Summer Time).

The Earth System Visioning Process is spearheaded by ICSU in cooperation with the International Social Science Council (ISSC). An editorial on the Visioning Process has been published in [*Science*](#) (Reid *et al.* Vol. 325, 17 July 2009, p. 245).

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About ICSU

Founded in 1931, ICSU is a non-governmental organization with a global membership of national scientific bodies (117 Members, representing 137 countries) and International Scientific Unions (30 Members). The Council is frequently called upon to speak on behalf of the global scientific community and to act as an advisor in matters ranging from the environment to conduct in science. ICSU’s activities focus on three areas: planning and coordinating research; science for policy; and strengthening the Universality of Science.