

STUDY OF NEW ZEALAND SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME  
PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

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# Study of New Zealand FP7 Project Participants

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This study constituted the construction and implementation of a qualitative survey targeted towards New Zealand researchers involved in *Seventh Framework Programme* (FP7) projects to date.

The aim of the research was to analyse New Zealand researchers' experiences of engagement with Europe under FP7 in order to identify any potential issues and/or common themes with regard to New Zealand-EU research collaboration. The collection of such data will, in turn, inform the type of information and services that the *Facilitating Research cooperation between Europe and New Zealand* initiative (FRENZ) and the *New Zealand Ministry of Research, Science and Technology* (MoRST) provide to New Zealand researchers, concerning the goal to facilitate more effective New Zealand-EU engagement within FP7.

FRENZ was commissioned by the *European Commission* (EC) and MoRST to survey New Zealand researchers as per the tasks detailed in Work Package 3 of the Description of Work. The questions and style in which they were delivered were designed to collect descriptive data concerning New Zealand researchers' experiences of collaboration in FP7 projects, any issues they might have encountered and any additional information and/or new services they might require regarding the domestic support systems in place to facilitate better New Zealand-EU research collaboration.

### The questionnaire

Participants were identified using information provided by the EC<sup>1</sup> regarding New Zealand researchers' inclusion in FP7 projects. The relevant respondents for each successful case were subsequently identified and contacted and asked to participate in a short interview concerning their experiences to date within the collaborative project in question.

Of the 39 projects identified as involving New Zealand participants, contact with the potential respondents revealed that three of the projects no longer involved input from New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> A further nine respondents expressed their willingness to participate in the study but stated that their involvement was yet to begin and thus asked for their projects to be revisited at a later date.<sup>3</sup> Four more potential participants expressed an interest in the survey but, due to both personal and professional commitments, were not available to take part in an interview during the timeframe of the initial study. Seven contacts could not be reached for comment. Responses were thus received from 16 researchers of whom many gave very detailed overviews of their collaborative experience within FP7.

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<sup>1</sup> To May 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Mediterranean Invasives Initiative (MII); Sea-level changes in western Europe and New Zealand during the past 500 years (SLC-ENZ); Innovative coastal technologies for safer European coasts in a changing climate (THESEUS).

<sup>3</sup> Risk of brain cancer from exposure to radiofrequency fields in childhood and adolescence (MOBI-KIDS); International Network in Theoretical Immunology (INTI); Metabolic Targeting of GnRH Neurons: Molecular Mechanisms and Neuropeptide Pathways (Meta-GnRH); Sound use for orientation by marine fauna, an ecosystem approach considering anthropogenic noise (SOUNDMAR); Opportunities for Access of European Researchers to the New Zealand Research System (ACCESS4EU:NZ); Pacific - EU Network for science and Technology (PACE-NET); Knowledge and Expertise Exchange Europe - New Zealand (KEEENZ); Towards an Interface for Detailed Musculoskeletal Models (MuscleUp); Land Use Modelling and Analysis Network (LUMAN).

## **Characteristics of participants**

### ***Gender, stage of career***

Of the 16 respondents, only two were female. All but one respondent were classified as senior researchers.

### ***Career placement***

The majority of participants were based at a New Zealand University, whilst six represented four of New Zealand's eight Crown Research Institutes (CRIs).<sup>4</sup>

### ***Project type***

Involvement in the *People* programme dominated the extent of New Zealand researchers' involvement in FP7 projects to May 2009. 10 of the 16 projects fell under the *People* programme.

Five of the remaining six projects fell into the *Cooperation* category, with the last project coming under the *Infrastructure* programme (INFRA).

### ***Project theme***

Of the five *Cooperation* programme projects New Zealand researchers were involved in, the research fields that were represented were Health, the Knowledge-Based Bio Economy (KBBE) and ICT.

Within the open topic *People* programme, the themes of the research projects were ICT, Mathematics, Physics, Engineering, Health and Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Biotechnology (FAFB).

When grouping the broader *People* programme project topics with those of the *Cooperation* programme, then, New Zealand researchers were predominantly involved in projects under the FAFB theme.

### ***Collaborative benefits for New Zealand***

Despite the varied types and themes of New Zealand researchers' FP7 project participation, results from the interviews revealed the presence of four broad themes concerning the question regarding the benefits of New Zealand-EU research collaboration:

- The opportunity to develop new skills and, in turn, assimilate these back into the New Zealand research community
- The ability to maintain and strengthen existing collaborative links
- The chance to develop new collaborative links with other project partners
- The opportunity to enhance individual/institutional visibility within Europe with a view to future cooperative initiatives

### ***Collaborative benefits for the EU***

All the respondents voiced the opinion that New Zealand researchers bring something unique and unavailable to Europe regarding FP7 project participation and that this "uniqueness" could be expressed in a variety of ways:

- Access to specific expertise
- Access to specific resources

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<sup>4</sup> Plant&Food Research, AgResearch, Landcare Research and NIWA

- The country's ability to act as a foreign testing ground concerning global FP7 initiatives

### ***Collaborative barriers encountered***

The difficulties or obstacles mentioned by respondents concerning New Zealand-EU FP7 collaboration included:

- Distance, time-difference and the necessity of travel
- The time consuming and highly competitive proposal process
- The absence of EU funds, with particular regard to the researcher's ability to attend Europe-based project meetings/events
- The absence of matching New Zealand funds (excluding MoRST's IRSES funding pool initiative)
- Miscommunication of information concerning the first round of IRSES

### ***Improvements and/or assistance required***

The majority of respondents mentioned the need for more information on, and better communication of, FP7 opportunities.

However, many of the researchers had not engaged with FRENZ concerning their participation in the FP7 project in question. The idea that the onus is ultimately on the researcher, concerning international collaboration, was a common one.

### **Final comment**

The results described here provide a summary of data collected from a small-scale qualitative study of New Zealand researchers' participation in FP7 projects to date. As such, the emerging issues and common themes will require further detailed research. The FRENZ Research Coordinator will seek to maintain an annual descriptive survey of New Zealand FP7 project participants in order to capture both new collaborative projects and new perspectives as existing projects progress.

# **Chapter 1 METHODOLOGY**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Upon the upgrade of the FRENZ project from its initial pilot phase, the initiative was commissioned to conduct a survey of members of the New Zealand research community engaged in FP7 projects. The aims of the study were to:

- analyse experiences of New Zealand-European engagement under FP7
- identify any new information/services required
- inform the development of Work Packages 1, 2 and 3.

The FRENZ Grant Agreement outlined in Work Package 3 that data would be collected via an online survey. However, due to the small number of active projects existing when work on the study began, the FRENZ Director and Research Coordinator agreed that a qualitative approach, via a short, structured interview, would yield more useful results.

The opportunity to take part in an interview was made available to all the researchers listed as representatives concerning New Zealand's participation in the FP7 projects from the data provided by the European Commission.

## **1.2 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN**

The structured interview focused on New Zealand-based FP7 project participants' perceptions on the following:

- the benefit to New Zealand regarding participation in an FP7 project
- the benefit to Europe in including New Zealand as a partner in an FP7 project
- impediments or constraints faced regarding New Zealand-Europe FP7 collaboration
- short and long-term assistance that could be provided by FRENZ, research institutions/universities and government in order to address these impediments and/or facilitate better New Zealand-Europe research collaboration
- useful advice to other New Zealand researchers considering participation in FP7

## **1.3 DATA COLLECTION**

### **Method**

The data was collected via short, structured interviews designed by the FRENZ Research Coordinator. The interviews were conducted by the Research Coordinator over the telephone or, where possible, in person. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed, with the Research Coordinator conducting the analysis.

This method of data collection was chosen due to the small target group and the need to gather more in depth, qualitative data, to effectively capture a snapshot of New Zealand-Europe FP7 project collaboration to date.

### **Interviews**

The representatives of New Zealand FP7 project participation, as listed in data provided by the Commission, were contacted by e-mail or telephone and asked to take part in a short, structured interview concerning their involvement in an FP7 project. Respondents were provided with the questions in advance.

Two rounds of follow-up e-mails and telephone calls were made concerning those respondents who failed to reply.

**Response rate**

Out of a possible total of 36, 29 responses were received. Of these, 16 completed the interview.

Nine respondents expressed their willingness to take part in this analysis of New Zealand-EU research collaboration at a later date, once their participation in the project in question had begun.

Four further respondents also indicated their interest in taking part in the study but were unavailable to comment during this round of interviews due to research and/or personal commitments.

## **Chapter 2 DISCUSSION**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section of the report provides a summary of the study's key findings.

The chapter begins with an overview of the characteristics of interview participants and the projects they were involved in.

Sections 2.3 and 2.4 discuss the reciprocal benefits of New Zealand-EU research collaboration.

Section 2.5 outlines existing difficulties concerning New Zealand-EU collaboration under FP7.

Section 2.6 covers improvements and/or assistance required in order to address collaborative barriers and foster better research cooperation, while Section 2.7 demonstrates the respondents' own thoughts regarding successful New Zealand-EU FP7 initiatives.

### **2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS**

#### ***Gender, stage of career***

Of the 16 respondents, only two were female. All but one respondent, involved as an early-stage researcher in the International Research Staff Exchange Scheme (IRSES) REDHOTGEN, were classified as senior researchers.

#### ***Career placement***

The majority of participants were based at a New Zealand University, whilst six represented four of New Zealand's eight Crown Research Institutes (CRIs).<sup>5</sup> The final respondent currently participates as a consultant for the MONITORING MEDICINES project and represents the World Health Organisation (WHO).

#### ***Project type***

Involvement in the People programme dominated the extent of New Zealand researchers' involvement in FP7 projects to May 2009. 10 of the 16 projects fell under the People programme, with seven of these constituting IRSES projects. Of the remaining People projects, there were two Marie Curie International Incoming Fellowships and one International Outgoing Fellowship.

Five of the remaining six projects fell into the Cooperation category, while the seventh comes under the only INFRA project New Zealand has been involved in to date.

#### ***Project theme***

Of the five Cooperation programme projects New Zealand researchers were involved in, two projects were successful within the Health theme, two in the Knowledge-Based Bio Economy (KBBE) theme and one in the ICT theme. The INFRA project, 4D4Life, is also classified as an ICT project.

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<sup>5</sup> Plant&Food Research, AgResearch, Landcare Research and NIWA

Within the open topic People programme, the seven IRSES projects were spread across ICT/Mathematics, Physics, Engineering, Health and Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Biotechnology (FAFB). Concerning the Marie Curie Fellowships, the two Incoming International Fellowships fell within the FAFB theme whilst ICT defined the Outgoing International Fellowship.

When grouping the broader People programme project topics with those of the Cooperation programme, then, New Zealand researchers were predominantly involved in projects under the FAFB theme.

## **2.3 COLLABORATIVE BENEFITS FOR NEW ZEALAND**

### **Skills**

The majority of respondents mentioned the exchange of skills, techniques and access to specific equipment as an important benefit of participation in an FP7 project:

*If we just talk about the benefits to myself, I've had an increase in skill levels in molecular diagnostics and developing new skills within the molecular biological systems. And, yes, some of the stuff we were doing was at the cutting of technology there.*

-Marie Curie International Incoming Fellow

The opportunity to also integrate these new skills and techniques upon return to New Zealand was also an important factor:

*The projects are obviously EU-focused, and so they have a different range of pests they're interested in, but there is some overlap. My participation in [the project] therefore allows me to introduce these new tools to New Zealand.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

### **Strengthening links**

Participants involved in the People Programme, in particular, stressed the importance of FP7 participation in strengthening existing collaborative links:

*We've developed close friendships with our collaborators, which I'm sure will help in the future for long term collaboration. After all, that's what science is all about, really, is the sharing of ideas and developing trust with your colleagues.*

-Marie Curie International Incoming Fellow

IRSES, in particular, was mentioned as a useful tool in facilitating valuable face-to-face contact with contacts in Europe:

*[The project] is not a huge project but we have had a few visitors already. We've already had two Italians that have come for two visits, as well as a Spanish researcher who has been three times... This helps to be more productive in science. So that's real benefit.*

-IRSES Participant

In essence, participation acts as another tool for researchers to manage their personal linkages.

## **New links**

Responses collated concerning the topic of personal linkages stressed that it is necessary to know your research partner/partners before engaging in a Framework Programme project with them. However, some of the respondents mentioned forging successful links with other, previously unknown, project partners as a result of their participation in the project:

*Initially, I didn't know two of the five partners at all. So this is a huge benefit – you come to know new research colleagues through this. It's a different experience.*

-IRSES Participant

*What we've attained to date is that we've attained linkages to the other partners in the programme – such that doors, I would guess, with any one of those entities will now open more easily.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

## **Visibility**

The opportunity to both raise the visibility of New Zealand research in Europe, and gain an up-to-date insight into European research, was an important factor for the respondents:

*The EU project now has created an avenue to enter into the European market. From New Zealand, we can approach Australia and we are working with US – but sometimes it is not easy to break into the European market. Hopefully this will give us an avenue to also market our technology.*

-IRSES Participant

*It's given me an insight into what's going on in Europe and I have been introduced to an international collaborative group. You are not simply seeing the New Zealand perspective in your field, but also internationally.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

*You keep in touch with major European initiatives and you just get to know the people and the projects and you simply get more engaged with the whole scientific community in your own particular area.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

## **2.4 COLLABORATIVE BENEFITS FOR THE EU**

Concerning EU FP7 partner classifications, New Zealand is determined as a “third country”. Thus, any project participation suggests that the New Zealand researcher involved is contributing something unique, and unavailable in Europe, to the project in question.

This benefit was voiced by all respondents and pertained to a variety of ways in which this “uniqueness” could be expressed:

### **Access to specific expertise**

*We have skill sets over here that they don't have. In any collaboration, each partner needs to bring something unique. So we've brought skills around modelling and a little bit around seaweed and seaweed culture.*

-IRSES Participant

*In the natural fibre area, [our institution] is well ahead of the other partners. We can learn analytical techniques from them, but they can learn a lot of high-end biocomposite science from us.*

-IRSES Participant

### **Access to specific conditions/resources**

*There are some particular things that we can contribute: our environment and climate are a bit different, the people... For example, if we were doing an international study of what causes asthma, we would need people from a range of countries from around the world... There are some particular things that we can study in New Zealand where we have an advantage.*

-IRSES Participant

### **Foreign testing ground**

*New Zealand is also able to provide another population group other than the European population – which is different in terms of both background and lifestyle. This allows the study of genetic and environmental issues.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

## **2.5 COLLABORATIVE BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED**

The difficulties researchers outlined that they had faced concerning their FP7 project participation were not unexpected. They related to the common themes of distance and travel, which tied in with a lack of funds, the time required to construct a bid and the lead time between submitting a proposal and the beginning of the project, if successful.

However, it should be noted that there was some interesting feedback concerning the first round of the IRSES initiative. One senior researcher stated that although he saw the scheme's merit in terms of mobility for younger researchers, the time required for visits was actually detrimental for senior researchers:

*Each visit is a minimum of one month. This makes it almost impossible for me to participate – I can't take that much time away from my lab. A week or two would be better. We can try and send more junior staff but the funds made available are limited to 1800 euros, which won't even pay the plane ticket. The principal is good but it's unlikely that I, personally, will be able to use it at all because of the criteria. It needs to be more flexible.*

-IRSES Participant

A further two respondents, who were also participants in two other IRSES projects, mentioned that they encountered problems in accessing the reciprocal MoRST fund once they had been accepted through the European proposal processes. They cited a breakdown in communication between the Ministry, their own institution, and the Commission as the reason for this.

With regard to specific difficulties, one of the Marie Curie Incoming International Fellows raised the point that delayed project start dates can create real problems for seasonal research. The project in question required the researcher to conduct his experiments over two summers and one winter. However, due to the start-date delay, the respondent missed the opportunity to arrive in time to carry out his research during the first summer. Although there was no issue in receiving an extension from the Commission concerning the project, the researcher

encountered problems at the Member State level when he was refused another visa to re-enter the host country. However, this is the only case to date of this type of difficulty regarding New Zealand FP7 participation.

## **2.6 IMPROVEMENTS AND/OR ASSISTANCE REQUIRED**

Despite the recurring themes concerning barriers to FP7 engagement, as outlined above, only a few respondents requested the opportunity to access more funds. The majority instead mentioned the need for more information on, and better communication of, FP7 opportunities.

The type of information mentioned by respondents varied, from information concerning collaborative opportunities, to that of practical guidelines for engaging in activities such as IRSES, to information concerning what to expect once in Europe:

*As long as we get the information, the onus is on the researcher. They have to find their partners, they have to have good compatibility and they have to a good research area. But, they do have to have the information too.*

-IRSES Participant

*It does come down to that connection at the level of the scientists. You can help connect the organisations but unless the scientists are actually happy to work together, it's not going to happen. It comes down to the very grass roots connection. And it comes down to us having common scientific interests, common underlying philosophies or beliefs or, in the case of this one, in terms of what we should be trying to achieve with animal science. So, it's being able to get that scientific connection unhindered.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

*It would probably be useful for the research institutions to have lists of people who have been involved, someone who others can go to for mentoring. Having someone onsite that understands how the projects function.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

## **2.7 ADVICE TO OTHER NEW ZEALAND RESEARCHERS ENGAGING WITH FP7**

Given the combination of distance and New Zealand's status as a Third Country with regards to access to the Framework Programme, the overwhelming consensus from respondents concerning advice to others looking to participate in an FP7 project was that strong links with a European partner are of utmost importance:

*Beyond the general "be sure of your partners"? Make sure that you are offering something unique. Because that's probably going to enhance your chance of success at the European end.*

-IRSES Participant

*I think the main thing is that they need to have good colleagues in Europe. You need to have these links already – there is no chance making them through institutions. You can work to get funding with the institutions afterwards. But you can't just find "someone" to work with in Europe.*

-IRSES Participant

*It's got to work for you, personally. It's that simple. You've got to see merit in it. And you've got to see merit in it, not just at the scientific level, advancing your science, but you've got to believe in what's being done too... You've got to be able to work with the people. You've got to trust them, trust their belief system. That's important.*

-Cooperation Programme Participant

## ANNEX

### New Zealand-based Training and Support



Annual analysis of the extent of New Zealand participation (New Zealand-EU projects to date).

Survey/interview of participants to analyse the experience of engagement

This will lead to the identification of best practice promoting successful participation, and help to identify any new FRENZ services that may be required.

1. What were the benefits **you** obtained from the European research collaboration(s) you have been involved in?
2. What were the benefits that your **European partners** obtained from New Zealand participation?
3. What, if any, were the main **impediments** and **constraints** that you faced in your collaboration(s)?
4. With your answer to the previous question in mind, what **improvements** could realistically be made by **FRENZ**, in the **short term**, in order to minimise the effect of these impediments?
5. What **improvements** do you think could realistically be made at the **institutional level**?
6. What **improvements** do you think could realistically be made at the **governmental level**?
7. What **actions** could realistically be taken by **FRENZ**, in the **longer term**, to further **enhance New Zealand-EU collaboration** under FP7?
8. What **actions** could realistically be taken at the **institutional level**?
9. What **actions** could realistically be taken at the **governmental level**?
10. What **lessons** and/or **advice** would you impart upon a colleague considering engaging with Europe under FP7?