

Speaking Out - what stops us and why?

As research scientists are coming under increasing pressure to communicate science more effectively to the public, the obstacles inherent in such communications are becoming apparent. These obstacles may be created by employers, wishing to check and release information through “official” channels, but just as often are thrown up by the communicating parties themselves. There are mis-matched expectations of what information is needed, how it should be delivered and how it can be used. For a scientist, interactions with non-science audiences can be fraught with more than just concerns about credibility, advocacy and time out from their research. More fundamentally, the requests made of us can sit uncomfortably with our training and principals, and even with those personal characteristics that make us good at what we do. As a prelude to the Science Communication workshop at this conference, an analysis of some of the impediments to “speaking out” effectively will be undertaken in this plenary, from the perspective of an aquatic experimental geochemist who began her career in a highly specialised research group in government organisation, and has diffused slowly into a role which requires broader communication of water issues.