Abstract  The practice of scientists acting as advocates in their own political cause is a relatively recent one around the world. The primary cause of their advocacy is their desire to maintain or increase funding. Despite a natural reluctance to undertake lobbying activities, science has learned that it must engage with policymakers if it wishes to maintain its influence and funding. The chapter details a number of the formal and informal methods science has used, drawing examples from the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada. It charts the emergence of science advisers to governments, either as individuals or committees. It looks at the formation of advocacy groups, and contrasts their strategy and activities with lobby groups representing non-science interests. The paper concludes that advocacy is not always a natural and easy course for scientists, but one they must undertake. The voice of science advocacy is not strong, but it is there.

Keywords  Science advocacy, science lobbying, FASTS, Congressional Visits Day, Science meets Parliament

The practice of scientists acting as advocates in their own political cause is a relatively recent one around the world. The primary cause of their advocacy is their desire to maintain or increase funding.

Scientists are ambivalent about lobbying: they tend to regard such activities as crass and distasteful, but are beginning to realize they are being out-competed. In the past they had a naive faith that the value of science was self-evident and that it would therefore be automatically recognized and funded by legislators. But scientists have come to realize that, just like every other interest, science needs to make its case against competing demands for government funds—hospitals, roads, the war against terrorism, the environment and social services.

At the same time, they recognize that lobbying for funds risks contradicting the ‘disinterested’ approach science espouses, and could be seen as compromising the integrity of their work:
To many scientists the advocacy role seems, as Daniel Greenberg put it, somehow ‘inappropriate’:

Physicians, trial lawyers, real-estate agents, and other professionals take the political route to promote their interests. They collectively raise money and give it to favored candidates, which is what counts in electoral politics, and thereby gain politicians’ attention. But for scientists, that’s out of character. They did it once on a big scale, in 1964, when Republican Barry Goldwater’s nuclear saber rattling created alarm among the physicist alumni of the World War II A-bomb project and many other researchers. They raised significant sums and sent leading scientists barnstorming around the country to denounce Goldwater and boost Democratic candidate Lyndon Johnson. But after that, they swore off organized politics as inappropriate for the scientific community. (Greenberg 2007)

Despite that natural reluctance, science has since engaged with policymakers through a number of formal and informal mechanisms. Funding is not the only issue. Science has a strong hand to play in the evidence-based policymaking that many governments pride themselves on. At times the science can be drowned by a multitude of other voices, from self-interested industries to aggrieved communities and passionate advocates of causes. If science is to be heard, it has to compete, especially on controversial issues such as climate change, environmental legislation and the teaching in schools of ‘intelligent design’ as a competing theory on the origin of the species.

In response (and it has been a response, not an initiative), science has moved to make its voice heard in the national capitals of the world. The voice not strong, but it is there. At times science works within the executive or legislative arms of government; in other cases, it operates completely independently of government, making the first steps towards organizing itself like ‘physicians, trial lawyers and real-estate agents’.

This chapter describes the emergence of these voices, drawing on some international examples and trends, and looking at the approaches and strategies different groups have used.

13.1 Science Advisers and Chief Scientists

In the US and the UK, there were moves early in the Cold War to increase the representation of the views and expertise of the scientific community in government, to complement the more scholarly representations of groups such as the learned academies, the Royal Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. (Greenberg 2007)

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1Nigel Cameron; retrieved from http://choosingtomorrow.blogspot.com/2007/02/triumph-for-science-or-merely-for.html