Talking to members of parliament about the importance of science

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“Science meets Parliament” Day (SmP) brings 200 scientists and technologists into Australia’s national capital Canberra for one-on-one meetings with federal politicians.

SmP is organised by the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS). It runs over a day and a half. The first part is a Briefing Day, devoted to strategy, tactics and issues. Briefing Day features a range of speakers including senior Parliamentarians and bureaucrats, journalists and successful lobbyists from other groups. The day culminates in a reception at Parliament House.

The second day is devoted to one-on-one meetings between a pair of scientists and individual members of Parliament. Normally these meetings last about 40 minutes, although some stretched out to 90 minutes.

Australia has 224 Parliamentarians, divided between the House of Representatives and the Senate. One hundred and forty two, or nearly two-thirds, of those politicians agreed to meetings including some members of Cabinet.

This sort of access to Parliamentarians is unprecedented in Australia. This is not because science and technology are so highly regarded (they’re not!), but because the idea of lobbying in this way does not seem to have occurred to other groups.

The paper will describe all aspects of organisation, including budget, pre-event training, and the issues discussed at the one-on-one meetings. It will talk about how MPs and scientists responded, and look at evaluation sheets from scientists where the overall event rated a score of 8.2 out of 10.