DURING 2012 I travelled the breadth and width of the country, made many speeches, gave many high-level briefings and attended many events and even more meetings. I met lots of people and was heartened by their interest in science.

It was immensely interesting, but I can’t say it gave me a representative insight into how Australians view science and where their interests lie. Most of the people I met at these events had an interest in the specific topic we were discussing or had come to tell me whether they agreed or disagreed with some aspect of the science.

This led me to wonder what Australians more generally think about science. I know that the average Australian family enjoys the fruits of science every hour of every day; but does science intrigue them? Do they think about how science shapes the food they eat, the medicines they take and the technology they use? Are there issues in science that are not necessarily part of the topical agenda that intrigue them? Importantly, are there parts of science in the media rendered opaque by the tendency of scientists to talk in technical language?

What would Australians like to know more about? What, if anything concerns Australians about science? What inspires them?

So we asked them.

We commissioned a survey, asking people to identify the important issues they wanted science to address. Collating the results allowed us to start framing the narrative for the book you are about to read.

We then set about finding the right people to write the book. They needed knowledge, creativity and passion. Leigh Dayton agreed to come aboard as editor. Both she and the authors have contributed hours and effort beyond what we or they imagined. For that I say thank you. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the staff in my office, without them, this book would not have seen the light of day.

Finally, to you, the reader, I also say thank you. As a citizen of the Curious Country, this is very much your book.

I hope you find it informative, but more than that, I hope you enjoy reading it. – Ian Chubb