



Statement regarding the conviction of Italian earthquake scientists

Australian Academy of Science

The Australian Academy of Science, a fellowship of Australia's most eminent scientists, wishes to express its concern about the liability apportioned in the case involving six scientists who gave advice prior to the earthquake in L'Aquila, Italy, in 2009.

Dealing with scientific uncertainty and risk communication is a difficult task. In the case of earthquake prediction, understanding has grown considerably in recent years. Seismologists can forecast regions that are more susceptible to large earthquakes based on broad patterns, but cannot predict the time and precise location of events. The inherent unpredictability of earthquakes makes assessment of short-term risk very difficult and nuances of language in conveying risk can lead to differing interpretations.

The Academy does not have access to information about the Italian case. While the written report of the Court is not expected for some time, it appears clear that it was not the science of earthquake prediction that was on trial. Rather, it was the care taken in delivering the advice that was provided.

The outcome of the trial must be considered in the context of Italian law, and the Academy understands that this outcome is subject to appeal, and that the defendants are free until the appeals process is completed.

The Academy considers the case to be a reminder that while formulating advice based on the best available evidence, scientists must apply due diligence and ensure proper procedures are followed. It also highlights the importance of effective processes to translate scientific evidence and knowledge into public policy and advice.