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Official Launch of the National Youth Science Forum

Australian National University

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It is a pleasure to speak to you on this fine day as your Chief Scientist to share a few of my impressions about the importance of the National Youth Science Forum to Australia.

As Chief Scientist for Australia, my role is to provide independent advice to the Government on science, technology and innovation issues of central or emerging importance.

Australia's health and wealth depends on science, engineering and technology in so many ways, and this will be increasingly so in the future. One only need think of a few of the challenges and opportunities facing us, to realise that this is true.

Issues such as:

Managing our precious water

Improving health care for segments of the Australian population, particularly those who have been disadvantaged in the past

Understanding, mitigating against, and adapting to climate change

Smart technologies for open yet secure information sharing

Adding value to our industrial and service products through novel scientific ideas and clever engineering solutions

Exploring and implementing sustainable energy generation

Stewardship of our natural resources, environment, and the flora and fauna with whom we share them

As important as science is to Australia, what is not always appreciated is also how much *fun* science is. Science is a way of asking questions about the world around us, and learning how to translate the answers when that world speaks back to us. It is a creative and inquisitive activity; one that does not limit the imagination, but does require discipline in formulating answers.

These are the things that drew me to science. The opportunity to learn how to listen to the universe we live in and piece together the puzzle of responses into a more and more complete picture of understanding that is based on evidence and logic. I've had a tremendous amount of fun doing so, and that fun is reflected in the activities of the

Forum planned by its organisers, who include some of the participants from previous years.

The bright young minds who attend this Forum, are some of the most promising in Australia. They will be among those leaders of tomorrow who tackle many of our challenges --- including some of we are not yet aware --- on behalf of all of us, and we must give them the tools with which to do so.

This forum is one such small gift, made possible by the sponsors of this event, who deserve our thanks.

Through the Forum, these young scientific leaders of tomorrow will be exposed to some of today's leaders. They will be able to see and learn, first hand, about the exciting discoveries that are taking place in the laboratories of Australia. Importantly, they will begin --- perhaps subconsciously --- forming a network of peers that will need as society and its science becomes more cross-disciplinary and more interconnected. In short, they will be beginning a process of becoming an integral part of Australia's future.

That is why I am here today, to help launch a small but important part of Australia's future. I thank you for the opportunity, and congratulate the sponsors, organizers and attendees of Australia's 2009 National Youth Science Forum.