



Australian Government

Chief Scientist

STATEMENT

7 December 2015

NATIONAL INNOVATION AND SCIENCE AGENDA

I welcome the Government's *National Innovation and Science Agenda*.

This is a comprehensive Agenda, designed to lift Australia's performance in a key area that will underpin the future of our country. I am delighted to be able to support all the elements outlined.

We should all know by now that we have to change. We can't rely forever on luck and an expectation of a never-ending supply of resources that the world wants. Making our way will require us to use our wit, talents and skills. We will have to be creative and imaginative, as well as informed assessors and managers of risk. We will have to change our culture.

We can do it. It is no time to quibble and blame somebody else. We are all in this together. This Agenda is a very, very substantial step forward.

I have long argued that Australia needs a whole-of-government approach to this complex but critical area. This new Agenda rightfully places innovation and science at the centre of the Government's long-term policy agenda, with a committee of Cabinet to be responsible for innovation and science. This committee will bring together the Prime Minister and relevant Ministers and will enable a much more strategic and cohesive approach. We may have seen the last, I hope, of multiple programmes in many portfolios with few connections even when the impact of decisions in one can have substantial implications for others.

The Agenda also announces Innovation and Science Australia. This important advisory body will be chaired by Mr Bill Ferris AC and my successor, Dr Alan Finkel AO, will be the deputy chair. I wish them and their colleagues well as they provide robust advice to Government. It will be important that we continue to learn from what others are doing. The world won't stop because we have changed. And it is doubtful that everything in this complex package will work precisely as planned; or as well as it could with the benefit of evaluation and refinement. Innovation and Science Australia will have a key role in ensuring advice, including suggested improvements as and when needed, is taken to Cabinet.

The Commonwealth Science Council will continue to be chaired by the Prime Minister. Just as there is more to innovation than science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), there is much more to science than innovation. Australian science and pure research

will position Australia in a world thirsty for knowledge that can be used to solve, manage or mitigate many of the great challenges that face us all.

While all science is important, there are some areas more important than others right now: these are captured by the National Science and Research Priorities which the Government will use to direct a proportion of its research and development budget. We can't let the old and more scattered approach continue to dominate the allocation of a severely rationed resource. I am also relieved that the Government has chosen to invest directly in an important area – quantum computing – and they should be congratulated for electing to pick a winner because they assess that we can win.

I am pleased to see funding identified to support and encourage the translation of ideas into goods and services that can be taken to the global marketplace. It is an important part of our future, and while there are examples now of good practice in this area, the new initiatives, together with changes to regulations and taxation, will encourage the building of scale. If we look at Germany, and we examine the Fraunhofer Institutes for example, we could learn a good lesson. And see how to build scale.

Likewise I welcome the establishment of an Australian version of the Small Business Innovation Research program first developed in the United States. Many other countries have since emulated this program (we all change the name, ours is Business Research and Innovation Initiative), and there is no sensible reason why it shouldn't work in Australia. Transforming procurement is a key; it should have been done long ago.

Little of this can happen if the education system as a whole does not produce the pipeline of talents, skills and inclination to turn Australia from what it is to what we want it to be. It starts early so commitment to science in pre-school and other steps taken by the Government, as well as a national STEM strategy for schools, will be critical elements. Constructive actions are being taken.

Universities have a key role to play – with their talent, skills and creativity in abundance. Encouragement to link with business is an important element in this Agenda, although universities are not the only cause of the present malaise. Businesses large, small and medium also have to step up and take advantage of the new opportunities. Too few have.

I am pleased that the Chief Scientist will have responsibility for identifying Australian research infrastructure needs and renewal; although it is true that securing the funding to support infrastructure on the scale needed must be seen as a work in progress.

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Australia's Chief Scientist

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