

# Record of 2<sup>nd</sup> Commonwealth Science Council meeting

13 April 2015

Cabinet Room

Parliament House, Canberra

## **Participants**

The Prime Minister, the Hon Tony Abbott MP  
The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP, Minister for Industry and Science  
The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Minister for Education and Training  
The Hon Sussan Ley MP, Minister for Health  
Professor Ian Chubb AC, Australia's Chief Scientist  
Professor Ian Frazer AC, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Professor Nalini Joshi, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Professor Tanya Monro, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Professor Brian Schmidt AC, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Mr Ken Boal, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Mr Michael Chaney AO, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Dr Jackie Fairley, Commonwealth Science Council member

## **Apologies**

Professor Timothy Davis, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Mr David Knox, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Ms Catherine Livingstone AO, Commonwealth Science Council member  
Mr Martin Bowles PSM, Secretary, Department of Health  
Mr Michael Thawley AO, Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

## **Additional attendees**

The Hon Karen Andrews MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry and Science  
Mr Tony Kingdon, Acting CEO, National Health and Medical Research Council  
Professor Aidan Byrne, CEO, Australian Research Council  
Dr Larry Marshall, CEO, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation  
Mr Philip Clark AM, Chair, Research Infrastructure Review Committee  
Ms Glenys Beauchamp PSM, Secretary, Department of Industry and Science  
Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education and Training  
Dr David Gruen, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Mr Mark Cormack, Deputy Secretary, Department of Health  
Mr Shaun Schmitke, Senior Adviser, Prime Minister's Office  
Ms Emma Cully, Senior Adviser, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

## **Secretariat**

Dr Simon Prasad, Director and Chief of Staff, Office of the Chief Scientist  
Dr Will Howard, Assistant Director, Office of the Chief Scientist  
Ms Helen Horton, Office of the Chief Scientist

Meeting commenced at 10.40am

### **Agenda Item 1 - Welcome and Introduction**

The Prime Minister welcomed members to the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Commonwealth Science Council (the Council) and acknowledged significant progress on key science and technology issues.

The Prime Minister outlined three key challenges that need to be addressed for Australia to maintain and improve its position in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM): getting more students to study STEM subjects; better teaching of STEM subjects; and businesses making better use of STEM and STEM skills.

The Prime Minister welcomed the Hon Karen Andrews MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry and Science, to her first meeting of the Council. He congratulated the Chief Scientist on the extension of his term to the end of 2015.

### **Agenda Item 2 – Record of Meeting and Actions Arising from the Previous Meeting**

Members endorsed the record of meeting from the previous meeting.

Agenda item 5 *Australia's participation in the Global STEM Alliance* was deferred from the previous meeting. The Council were not supportive of Australia's participation in the New York Academy of Sciences' Global STEM Alliance. The benefit was regarded as limited and the Government has higher STEM-related priorities.

### **Agenda Item 3 – STEM Strategy Update and Next Steps**

The Prime Minister acknowledged the effort of the Minister for Industry and Science, the Minister for Education and Training and the Chief Scientist, in providing advice to inform government policy for STEM.

The Chief Scientist updated the Council on work following from the Council's consideration of his STEM paper at its first meeting. He outlined options for the government to consider in response to the STEM paper recommendations. The Chief Scientist anticipated further public consultation to inform a Government response.

Members agreed that a whole-of-government STEM strategy was very important and immediate action was required.

Minister Pyne informed the Council of actions within his portfolio. The Government has accepted the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group's recommendations on the need for new primary school teachers to specialise in science, mathematics or languages; and the Review of the Australian Curriculum outcomes of increasing the depth and reducing the breadth of the school curriculum.

Members discussed the need to encourage more students at secondary and tertiary levels to take STEM subjects and to attract more of the best students to STEM teaching.

Members acknowledged that matters relating to schools are not within the Commonwealth's responsibilities, but noted the capacity of the Commonwealth to influence STEM activities and teaching in schools.

Members discussed the role of STEM in the jobs of the future and the need to engage with business and industry in any consultation.

The Council noted that the Minister for Industry and Science, working with other Ministers, particularly the Minister for Education and Training, and the Chief Scientist, will lead further consultation and subsequent work on government STEM policy.

#### **Agenda Item 4 – Science and Research Priorities**

The Chief Scientist provided an update to the Council on work on the science and research priorities and associated practical challenges since the first Council meeting

He informed the Council that he held workshops with expert working groups to identify practical challenges under each priority area. The Chief Scientist had asked attendees in the workshops to identify the 2-3 most pressing challenges currently facing Australia. During the workshops and subsequent consultation a number of cross-cutting issues were raised. They include big data; sustained provision of research infrastructure; a dynamic and skilled research workforce; domestic and international collaboration and technologies crossing priority areas.

The Australian Research Council, the National Health Medical Research Council and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation participated in the consultation process and support the need for science and research priorities.

The Council recommended the Government consider immediate adoption of the science and research priorities and associated practical challenges. The Council requested the National Science, Technology and Research Committee oversee capability mapping for each practical challenge.

#### **Agenda Item 5 – Update on *Boosting the Commercial Returns from Research*.**

The Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Industry and Science updated the Council on progress in implementing the Government's plan to boost commercial returns from research - part of the Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda. The Council was informed that the release of the draft intellectual property toolkit is a priority. The Council also discussed a report prepared by the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering on testing data for research engagement metrics, which will be released shortly.

The Council noted the progress and next steps under the *Boosting the Commercial Returns from Research Strategy*.

#### **Agenda Item 6 – Research Infrastructure Review – Interim report**

Mr Philip Clark AM, Chair of the Research Infrastructure Review Committee, briefed the Council on the Review committee's preliminary views and recommendations. Mr Clark mentioned the review was guided by principles consistent with international best practice, including sustained funding and appropriate governance arrangements for research infrastructure. The Review Committee aims to provide options for funding and governance of research infrastructure. The final report is due by mid-2015.

The Council noted the findings from the interim report of the Research Infrastructure Review Committee.

#### **Agenda Item 7 – Report of the Review of the Cooperative Research Centres Programme**

The Minister for Industry and Science discussed the findings in the final report *Growth Through Collaboration and Innovation* from the review of the Cooperative Research Centres Programme. Minister Macfarlane informed the Council that the review centred on the need for CRCs to have a clearer focus on producing commercial outcomes, and aligning with the Industry Growth Centres initiative.

The final review report is being considered by Government, before public release.

The Council noted the findings from the final report of the Review of the Cooperative Research Centres Programme.

## **Agenda Item 8 - Closing remarks**

Members endorsed a communiqué for the meeting.

Members agreed on a forward work programme, with key items to include:

- the Government's response to the Chief Scientist's report: *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Australia's Future*;
- adoption of science and research priorities, and capability mapping for each of the practical challenges;
- implementation of the *Boosting the Commercial Returns from Research* Strategy;
- implementation of the Industry Growth Centres initiative; and
- the final report of the Research Infrastructure Review.

The Council agreed to meet in the second half of 2015.

The Prime Minister thanked members for their valuable contribution and recognised their important role in making Australia a better science nation and closed the meeting at 12:50pm.