



Chief Scientist

## AUSTRALIA 2025: SMART SCIENCE

### THE CONVERSATION



We already have a good idea of the challenges ahead – and now we know how science can help. Kris Krüg/Flickr, CC

## Chief Scientist's view: the smart path for an uncertain future

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*AUSTRALIA 2025: How will science address the challenges of the future? In collaboration with The Conversation, we asked how each science discipline will contribute to Australia now and in the future.*

What will life be like in 2025?

There are probably as many responses to that question as there are people prepared to answer it.

Some look ahead to an exciting world of driverless cars, 3D printing and trillions of devices connected to a global web. It's a world of opportunity for all.

Others see only a grim future of mass extinctions and ever-dwindling resources, with the benefits of new technologies carved up among the few.

The truth, of course, is that the story is not yet written.

We are the authors, not just the characters, in this our chapter – and we decide how we respond to the challenges the future throws down.

I believe that our capacity as human beings is profound.

We know this from the historical record. From the time of the first known technological innovations, dating back some 72,000 years, new knowledge has enabled societies to leapfrog their competitors or live more securely in uncertain times.

We know it also from the record of our own lives. In 2005, who would have foreseen the impact of the iPad or the smartphone?

Approaching 2015, who can doubt that the decade to 2025 will be shaped by the leaders in science? That economic prosperity will be tied to scientific capability? That new ways of living must be found if our planet is to sustain us all in health and comfort?

It may inspire us, or overwhelm us, but through science we are changing our world. Surely we ought to take responsibility for changing it for the better.

At the start of this series we threw down this gauntlet to some of the brightest lights in Australian science.

We framed an aspiration for 2025 that we hoped would speak to all of us, as scientists or citizens:

*Australia in 2025 will be strong, prosperous, healthy and secure and positioned to benefit all Australians in a rapidly changing world.*



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Then we sought to understand what each of the disciplines could offer towards that goal.

I offer my sincere thanks to all of the scientists who have shared their incredible vision.

Very few of the issues raised are unique to any one article, a reminder that collaboration is essential if we are to see real progress on our goals. We need the new ways of thinking that spark when the disciplines combine.

At the same time, we need to keep sight of the unique contribution that every discipline has to make. In a cross-disciplinary world, we are only as strong as our weakest link. We need to be ready to snatch opportunity wherever it lies.

There are serious questions here for all Australians.

I hope the articles have informed you, challenged you – and perhaps changed your perspective on your own journey to 2025.