



Australian Government

Commonwealth Science Council

Record of 1st Commonwealth Science Council meeting

27 November 2014

Cabinet Room

Parliament House, Canberra

Participants

The Prime Minister, the Hon Tony Abbott MP
The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP, Minister for Industry
The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Minister for Education
The Hon Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Health
Professor Ian Chubb AC, Chief Scientist for Australia
Professor Timothy Davis, Commonwealth Science Council member
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
Mr David Knox, Commonwealth Science Council member
Ms Catherine Livingstone AO, Commonwealth Science Council member

Apologies

Mr Martin Bowles PSM, Secretary, Department of Health

Additional attendees

Professor Warwick Anderson AM, CEO, National Health and Medical Research Council
Professor Aidan Byrne, CEO, Australian Research Council
Mr Craig Roy, Acting CEO, CSIRO
Dr David Gruen, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Ms Glenys Beauchamp PSM, Secretary, Department of Industry
Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education
Ms Kerry Flanagan PSM, Deputy Secretary, Department of Health
Mr Matt Stafford, Cabinet Secretary, Prime Minister's Office
Mr Sam Watson, Adviser (Policy), Prime Minister's Office
Mr Greg Gilbert, Adviser (Science), Minister Macfarlane's Office
Dr Don Markwell, Adviser, Minister Pyne's Office
Ms Kristin McGill, Assistant Adviser (Policy), Minister Dutton's Office
Mr Neil Williams, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Dr Simon Prasad, Director & 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, Commonwealth Science Council Secretariat

Meeting commenced at 4.30pm



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Agenda Item 1 - Welcome and Introduction

The Prime Minister welcomed members to the inaugural meeting of the Commonwealth Science Council (the Council).

Agenda Item 2 – Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Science Council and the National Science, Technology and Research Committee

Members considered and agreed to the Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Science Council and the National Science, Technology and Research Committee.

Agenda Item 3 – The State of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in Australia

3A - *Benchmarking Australian science, technology, engineering and mathematics* – a report from the Office of the Chief Scientist

The Chief Scientist provided the Council with an overview of the report and its findings.

The report draws on multiple indicators and datasets to provide a comprehensive assessment of Australia's comparative performance in STEM.

Collectively, the indicators used in this report suggest that Australia's overall performance in STEM is better than countries in the Asia-Pacific region but below comparator countries in Western Europe and North America.

The Council agreed to refer the *Benchmarking Australian science, technology, engineering and mathematics* report to the National Science, Technology and Research Committee to use as an evidence base as it identifies areas to improve Australia's overall performance in STEM.

The Council noted that the report will be publicly released on 1 December 2014.

3B - Where does the funding go currently?

Members noted the current profile of Government investment in science, research and innovation.

In 2014-15, the Government is investing \$9.2 billion in science, research and innovation, across 115 line items and through 15 portfolios.

This investment is dominated by line items (70 out of 115) with expenditure of less than \$10 million per year.

Eighty seven per cent of total funding is invested in less than 20 line items.

3C - Strategy for science, technology, engineering and mathematics

Members discussed the Chief Scientist's *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Australia's Future* report and its recommendations for a strategic whole-of-government approach to STEM.

The Council discussed the recommendations which could have the greatest impact, and referred them to the National Science, Technology and Research Committee to consider their feasibility and for policy options and actions to be developed. The Chief Scientist will return with policy options and actions for consideration by the Council at its next meeting.

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Agenda Item 4 – Strategic investment in science and research

4A - Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Industry led a discussion on the Government's *Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda*. At the centre of this initiative is the establishment of Industry Growth Centres in five key sectors with the aim of bringing together business and research. Consultations on the initiative are well underway with a series of 'Ministerial Roundtables' already being held.

Members noted the current review of the Cooperative Research Centres Programme.

The report from this review will be provided to the Council to inform discussion at its next meeting.

4B - Boosting the commercial returns from research

The Minister for Education led a discussion on the proposals outlined in the *Boosting the commercial returns from research* discussion paper and the associated consultation process.

The Departments of Education and Industry are currently consulting the research and business sectors on the proposals in the discussion paper. This includes a public submission process that is due to conclude on 28 November 2014, as well as a series of forums with key stakeholders. These forums are being chaired by the Chief Scientist.

4C - Medical Research Future Fund

The Minister for Health led a discussion on the development of the \$20 billion Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF).

The Council agreed to refer the MRFF to the National Science, Technology and Research Committee for advice on mechanisms that will relate to the MRFF to the whole-of-government approach to investment in science and research.

4D - Science and Research Priorities

Members noted the consultation process undertaken by the Chief Scientist to develop the proposed science and research priorities.

Science and research priorities will ensure public investment in areas that are of immediate and critical importance to Australia. They will take into account areas of research excellence, industrial strength, global trends, comparative advantage and Australia's interests and needs.

As a next step in the implementation process, the Chief Scientist will lead further consultation to identify practical challenges for targeted research effort in each priority area.

The Council strongly supported the need and value of establishing science and research priorities, at the same time emphasising the critical importance of investigator-led research. The Council noted that only a proportion of public investment would be directed to science and research priority areas leaving scope to support research in other areas of science along with research in the humanities, arts and the social sciences.

The Council agreed to refer the proposed priorities to the National Science, Technology and Research Committee to develop practical challenges under each priority area. The Chief Scientist



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will return with a further developed set of priorities for consideration at the next meeting of the Council.

Agenda Item 5 – Global STEM Alliance

The Council deferred consideration of Australia’s participation in the Global STEM Alliance to its next meeting.

Agenda Item 6 – Forward work programme

The Council considered and agreed a forward work programme outlined in the Communiqué, comprising matters arising from the discussion during its inaugural meeting.

Agenda Item 7 - Closing remarks

Members endorsed a communiqué for the meeting.

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

The Prime Minister thanked members of the Council for their contribution and closed the meeting at 6.45pm.

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