



Australian Academy of Science

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by email to: ncris@dest.gov.au

Dr Michael Sargent, AM
Chair, NCRIS Committee
Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
PO Box 9839
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Dr Sargent,

Review of the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) Roadmap – Submission from the Australian Academy of Science

The Australian Academy of Science is pleased to provide the following comments in relation to the review of the NCRIS Roadmap.

Many of Australia's aging research facilities are in need of urgent upgrading or replacement, and NCRIS is equally important for identifying the next generation of research facilities to build national capabilities in key priority areas. Major national research facilities are also an important mechanism for attracting international collaborators and raising awareness about Australian research strengths. One welcome feature of the new NCRIS facilities is the multidisciplinary collaboration it has fostered between institutions.

The Academy considers NCRIS to be an essential component for addressing critical research infrastructure requirements for Australian researchers. The importance of first class national research infrastructure facilities was highlighted as one of the ten priorities in the Academy's recent policy statement on Research and Innovation in Australia:¹

Australia needs to make a long-term commitment to maintaining first class national research infrastructure facilities and promotes Australian access to international facilities

In addition to the establishment of research facilities, the NCRIS roadmap needs to include longer-term planning in its strategic outlook for the continued operation of facilities. For a number of the capabilities to be setup the technical infrastructure will only be in place towards the end of the five-year term and presently there are no resources for operation, maintenance and further development.

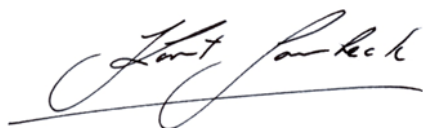
The efficient operation of major national research facilities also requires a high level of technical expertise. Although the level of funding support for the establishment of centres can be appropriate, it is proving difficult for many facilities to attract the necessary engineering and other expertise for the construction and operation of major new state-of-the-art equipment. It is appropriate that NCRIS researchers are not funded by the NCRIS infrastructure grants, but there is a need for NCRIS funding to be eligible in sufficient amounts to recruit the necessary technical expertise in a competitive market.

It is also critical that ARC or NHMRC research grants that require access to a particular National Collaborating Research Infrastructure include a line item to cover the cost of that access. In the longer term, it is important to note that to maintain world-class research facilities, the cost of infrastructure rises faster than the Consumer Price Index, and that the level of funding of infrastructure support remains under review to ensure that the overall infrastructure inventory remains world-class and able to leverage international collaboration, both in terms of overseas participation in Australian facilities and Australian access to international facilities.

An important component of these international linkages are those arrangements that provide access for Australian scientists to major international research facilities, such as the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), the Gemini telescope, the synchrotron light sources in Tsukuba, Japan, and Argonne in the USA; and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. Some of these arrangements (Gemini, Tsukuba, Argonne) are funded through the current Major National Research Facilities program. It will be important to continue and expand these arrangements to include facilities such as the International Ocean Drilling Program. It is also important that resources are available to provide for local and reciprocal international access to major Australian facilities, such as the Australia Telescope National Facility, the OPAL research reactor, and the Australian Synchrotron.

We look forward to the outcomes from the roadmap review which we consider to be important and timely in relation to the Government's commitment to innovation. In view of the forthcoming evaluation of the NCRIS program itself next year, the Academy is well placed to provide coordinated and integrated input into this process due to the experience of the many Academy Fellows and National Committees for Science members who are either institutional participants or users of NCRIS facilities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kurt Lambeck', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kurt Lambeck