

Australian Academy of Science submission on *Horizon Europe* implementation

Establishment of an effective implementation architecture is essential to realise the strategic benefits of Australia's association to Horizon Europe, enhancing national resilience and opening new avenues for innovation and discovery.

To support development of this structure in the timeframe to participate in 2027, the Academy advises that the Australian Government leverages existing capability within the research system to host the National Contact Points.

The Academy proposes a model where the National Contact Points are hosted within Australia's learned academies, structured by theme. The existing advice capability and national and international networks of the Academies are the ideal complement to drive Australia's participation in Horizon Europe.

The Academy also recommends:

- The Australian Government targets incentives at the **pre-proposal stage**, such as bilateral and multilateral seed funding and brokerage initiatives, to support development of research partnerships that generate successful Horizon Europe proposals.
- As well as aligning with national priorities, the Australian government should also promote collaborations that will deepen Australia's capability in strategic areas to support a thriving research system and build national capability.
- When measuring success, more attention be given to participation rates and diversity of proposals, amount awarded and development of strategic international collaboration networks and less emphasis be placed on success rate.
- The Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics engage with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to consider how investment in Horizon Europe, and Horizon Europe funding, will be reflected in Australia's R&D statistics to ensure the impact of association on the research system can be measured via this indicator.

Australia's ability to capitalise on the opportunity of Horizon Europe also depends on the strength of our domestic research system and R&D investment. The Academy urges the Australian Government to implement the recommendations of *Ambitious Australia* and raise Australia's R&D investment to internationally competitive levels.

Australia's learned academies are ideally positioned to host the National Contact Points

Establishing the structures to enable Australia's association to Horizon Europe to support strong participation in 2027 is no small task. To set Australia up for success, the Academy recommends that the National Contact Points (NCP) model seeks to leverage existing institutional capability and networks within Australia's research system and is adequately resourced to effectively facilitate Australia's participation.

Australia's learned academies are independent organisations who convene Australia's science, technology, engineering, health and medical science, humanities and social science expertise. The Academies are equipped to provide high-quality advice, support national coordination and engage researchers, industry and government around shared research goals. They are deeply familiar with Australian research strengths and opportunities, extensively engaged with international science and research networks, and agnostic to individual university incentives and motivations.

Therefore, the Academy proposes that the Tier 2 NCPs are hosted by Australia's learned academies (e.g. the Australian Academy of Science (AAS) and Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE)), who already possess the capabilities required to support rapid and effective implementation of the Horizon Europe program in Australia.

There are several advantages and areas of expertise the Academies provide that are required by the National Contact Points:

- A broad, national view to connect research sector organisations and researchers with opportunities, reducing potential duplication of proposals and providing coherent engagement with the Horizon Europe system. This could also help manage potential conflicts of interest by separating responsibilities while retaining national oversight.
- Established, coordinated expertise networks across research disciplines in Australia. For example, the AAS has 19 National Committees for Science that represent scientific research disciplines in Australia, and ATSE's STEM sector forums cover key areas such as energy, digital futures, mineral resources and climate change.
- The remit of the Academies aligns well with research themes or Horizon Europe clusters and provides full coverage of Australia's research landscape.
- Demonstrated capability to deliver international collaborative grant programs and support EU-Australia research partnerships. Current examples include the Global Science and Technology Diplomacy Fund and France and Europe EMCR Mobility Grants. The Academy of Science historically supported EU research collaboration as Australia's coordinating body in the [European Cooperation in Science and Technology](#) (COST) and Forum for European-Australian Science and Technology Cooperation (2002-2012).
- Strong existing relationships with domestic and international research sector organisations, the EU science diplomacy network and Pacific research networks through the International Science Council's Regional Focal Point for Asia and the Pacific (hosted by the Australian Academy of Science).
- Well-placed to understand Australia's existing research strengths and collaborations across institutions and between countries.

The expertise above is well matched to the thematic, disciplinary and network-based functions of the NCP role. This proposed NCP model is different to other associated countries who operate NCPs out of government, research councils or other research sector bodies. However, the independence, convening power, breadth of research networks, and existing ability of learned academies to deliver programs that support multilateral research partnerships, is well-suited to coordinating involvement across Australia's diverse and dispersed research system. This positions the Academies well to provide support for consortia and multidisciplinary teams bidding for Horizon Europe funding.

Horizon Europe participation also requires specialist financial, regulatory and legal advice – including the EU model grant agreement, cost eligibility and audit requirements, consortium agreements, intellectual property and data protection terms. This is a distinct skillset from disciplinary advice; as noted in the consultation paper, New Zealand delivers this through a dedicated Legal and Financial National Contact Point, separate from its six cluster NCPs. The Academy recommends this function be delivered either centrally through the Tier 1 NCP office or through a formal partnership with an organisation with existing EU grant administration experience, complementing the thematic advice the Academies are well placed to provide.

The Academies would provide national coordination and engagement with the European Commission, strategic advice and program delivery functions, under a formal agreement with DISR. This would include supporting applicants, connecting researchers and organisations with opportunities (via engagement with Tier 3 organisations) and maintaining international networks to foster collaborations.

The Academy recommends structuring the NCPs by theme or cluster. This is the clearest way to achieve national coordination, alignment with national priorities and promote collaboration between research and

industry sectors. The Academy advises against an approach based on state/territory geography as this could create a competitive system that would not be conducive to coherent national participation.

To strengthen engagement with the European Union, the Academy recommends Tier 2 NCPs be formally linked to Australia's existing Brussels-based DISR counsellor (Industry, Science and Resources) at the Australian Mission to the European Union, and to the EURAXESS Australia and New Zealand network, rather than establishing separate Europe-based representation.

The level of activity reasonably expected from Tier 3 organisations is to support their own researcher's engagement, proposal development, amplify and communicate with the NCPs. Research organisations in other associated countries have dedicated staff who support their researchers to engage, for example through support to prepare applications and communicating about the programs. The network identified in Tier 3 of the consultation paper is already forming and can largely happen organically through existing research sector networks and institutional capability. Smaller regional research organisations or SMEs may require support to coordinate involvement, potentially through existing peak bodies or similar entities.

[Proposed incentives to promote alignment with national priorities would help address resources required to develop proposals](#)

The Academy is supportive of the models proposed to target priority research calls. Applying for Horizon Europe funding takes significant time and effort. Providing a financial incentive at the proposal development stage for projects aligned with national priorities, as proposed in the consultation paper (Model A), would help address the resources required to prepare a proposal and encourage participation by entities who may not otherwise engage. A clear Government signal about long-term commitment to Horizon Europe association will also build partner confidence and assist uptake and success.

[Support for pre-proposal network building and partnership brokerage will be critical to promote strong proposals and Pacific collaborations](#)

Pre-proposal network development is a critical point for the Australian Government to target incentives to support development of research partnerships in areas of national priority, particularly at Australia's early stage of association. Robust Horizon Europe Pillar II proposals need to demonstrate mature partnerships, which take time to build. Only providing funding to successful proposals does not provide the support where it is needed to build the capability to generate successful applications. Bilateral and multilateral seed funding, mobility and brokerage initiatives can support development of the networks and partnerships that generate strong, successful Horizon Europe proposals.

These approaches are particularly important to build networks and broker partnerships in the Pacific region. Examples of similar initiatives delivered by the International Science Council's Regional Focal Point for Asia and the Pacific include [Seeds of Science Asia](#), [Tupu Pacific Research Grants](#) and the [Regional Challenge Research Initiative](#). The [Global Science and Technology Diplomacy Fund](#), administered by the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) and the Australian Academy of Science could be expanded to target strategic research partnerships to support Horizon Europe participation.

[Horizon Europe collaborations should seek to build capability, as well as support national priorities](#)

As well as aligning with national priorities, the opportunity of Horizon Europe is also in pursuing collaborations that will deepen Australia's capability in strategic areas and strengthen soft diplomacy. This could be informed by the capability gaps identified in *Australian Science, Australia's Future* in AI, biotechnology, geoscience, climate science, materials science, agricultural science, data science and epidemiology. A focus on capability will help support a thriving research system in the longer term, beyond just national priorities.

Advising on areas for national capability building could be part of the National Resilience and Science Council's role. The Learned Academies are also positioned to provide analysis to support alignment of priorities and areas where Australia should develop capability.

Measuring success

Australia should be realistic about measuring success after one year of association. From conversations with other recently associated countries, participating in Horizon Europe is a learning curve and building institutional capability takes time.

In the list of success measures proposed in the discussion paper, the Academy recommends that less emphasis be placed on success rate, and more attention be given to participation rates and diversity of proposals, proportion of funding and development of strategic international collaborations, including those that facilitate access to large collaborative research infrastructure.

Using New Zealand's success rate as a benchmark raises an unrealistic expectation. New Zealand has a smaller research base that is different to Australia. Applications to Horizon Europe have increased in recent years, and the overall success rate for proposals to the Horizon Europe program is 14%, with the success rates for the Pillar II clusters ranging from 10-20%.¹ Preparing and submitting an application demonstrates Australian demand and effort even when the proposal is not funded, particularly during the first participation rounds.

Performance of NCPs could be measured using the proposed indicators as KPIs, with additional metrics around awareness and engagement with the research sector and industry. Research network analysis based on bibliometric data can also indicate growing and evolving research networks with EU partners.

Mapping Horizon Europe clusters to Australia's national priorities would provide a clear guide to facilitate applications in areas of national interest and support measuring success across priorities.

To support analysis of the impact of Horizon Europe association on Australia's research and development system, DISR and the Australian Bureau of Statistics should engage with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to consider how investment in Horizon Europe, and Horizon Europe funding, will be reflected in Australia's R&D statistics.

To discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission, please contact Lauren Sullivan, Manager, Science Policy and Advice at science.policy@science.org.au.

¹ European Commission, Horizon Dashboard (2026), <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/horizon-dashboard>