Record of the 3rd Commonwealth Science Council meeting

21 October 2015

Cabinet Room

Parliament House, Canberra

Participants

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, Prime Minister
The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science
Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training
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
Dr Jackie Fairley, Commonwealth Science Council member
Mr David Knox, Commonwealth Science Council member

Apologies

Ms Catherine Livingstone AO, Commonwealth Science Council member
Mr Michael Chaney AO, Commonwealth Science Council member
Professor Timothy Davis, Commonwealth Science Council member
The Hon Sussan Ley MP, Minister for Health
The Hon Karen Andrews MP, Assistant Minister for Science (Invited Minister)
Mr Philip Marcus Clark AM, Chair, Research Infrastructure Review Committee (Presenter)
Mr Martin Bowles PSM, Secretary, Department of Health

Additional attendees

Ms Glenys Beauchamp PSM, Secretary, Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
Mr Drew Clarke PSM, Chief of Staff, Office of the Prime Minister
Ms Ali McDonald, Senior Adviser, Office of the Prime Minister
Mr Mark Brudenell, Senior Adviser, Office of the Prime Minister
Mr Adam Howard, Chief of Staff, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science
Mr Sandy Kay-Oswald, Adviser to Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science
Mr Darren Brown, Senior Adviser, Minister for Education and Training
Mr Alex Polson, Adviser, Minister for Education and Training
Mr Simon Atkinson, Chief of Staff, Minister for Finance
Dr David Gruen, Deputy Secretary, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
Mr Dom English, Group Head, Department of Education and Training
Mike Lawson, Innovation and Science Taskforce, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
Ms Emma Cully, Senior Adviser, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

Secretariat

Dr Simon Prasad, Director and Chief of Staff, Office of the Chief Scientist
Dr Felice Beitzel, Office of the Chief Scientist
Ms Robin Hulm, Office of the Chief Scientist

Meeting commenced at 4:00pm

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Agenda Item 1 - Welcome and Introduction

The Prime Minister welcomed members to the 3rd meeting of the Commonwealth Science Council (the Council), and said that he was pleased and excited about his role as chair of the Council. He expressed his enthusiasm to hear the views of the Council on science, research and technology issues.

The Prime Minister outlined that the Government recognised the central importance of science, research and technology in driving prosperity. He noted that for Australia to remain a high wage, first world economy, it must be more sophisticated and imaginative in the use of science and technology.

The Prime Minister said that securing future prosperity requires Australia to be a nation known for innovation and science. He acknowledged that such an ambition will be achieved by transforming our culture - highlighting that an innovative, inquisitive and scientific culture within societies and organisations, although hard to measure, is essential to Australia's future.

The Prime Minister thanked the Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb AC, for his important contributions to the Council and for his phenomenal advocacy for Australian science.

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 3 – National Innovation and Science Agenda

The Prime Minister opened the discussion noting that innovation and science are inseparably linked and are a central part of the Government's economic agenda. The Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science then outlined the Government's current actions on innovation.

Minister Pyne explained that the Government has established an Innovation Taskforce, which he is chairing and comprises members from the Departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Education and Training, Health, Finance, Treasury, and Industry, Innovation and Science. He noted that due to the interlinked nature of innovation and science, both will be addressed in the agenda which is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Minister Pyne described key themes the Innovation Taskforce are examining, including collaboration; culture - startups and capital raising; the expansion of talent/skills; and the Government leading by example.

He reiterated the importance of promoting cultural change as part of the agenda; acknowledging the long term nature of the challenge and highlighting that positive progress has already been made, including the renaming of the Prime Minister's Prize for Innovation awarded as part of the Prime Minister's Prizes for Science.

The Prime Minister then invited the Chief Scientist to present the Council with an outline of potential elements in a national innovation and science agenda.

The Chief Scientist said that there was substantial momentum to put in place such a national innovation and science agenda. He explained that the outline was based on feedback received during the consultations on the Government's response to the recommendations in his paper *STEM: Australia's future*.

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The Chief Scientist noted that the outline was also informed by work done in the last two years, including wide consultations on innovation and STEM. He highlighted that these consultations identified the need for urgent action, and a whole-of-government approach in the development of a long-term plan for innovation and science.

The Council accepted the outline as presented by the Chief Scientist, and supported the interlinked elements, innovation, education, community engagement, research, and international engagement, within it.

The Council agreed that the themes described by Minister Pyne were consistent with the elements presented by the Chief Scientist and recommended that the Government urgently develop a comprehensive and whole-of-government national innovation and science agenda.

The Council welcomed the view that science and technology must play a part in Australia being a first world economy with higher wages and a generous social welfare net, and urged the development of a long-term vision for Australian innovation and science.

Members discussed the complex and long-term nature of innovation, highlighting the importance of ensuring community understanding of innovation, and the need for cultural change.

The Prime Minister invited views from members on the role of Government in promoting collaboration. The Council held the strong view that the Government has a critical leadership role and can consider international best practice on this issue.

The discussion on collaboration included: providing incentives for collaboration; improving metrics for university collaboration; dealing with IP issues; and delivering appropriate programmes (such as Researchers in Business). Members commended the work of the Industry Growth Centres and encouraged their development beyond virtual centres.

The development of a long term-vision for Australian innovation and science was extensively discussed and was widely supported by the Council. Members agreed that developing the National Innovation and Science Agenda was a matter of urgency for the Government.

Agenda Item 3A – Research Infrastructure Review – Final Report

The Minister for Education and Training presented the final report of the Research Infrastructure Review to the Council, emphasising that outstanding research is driven by outstanding research infrastructure.

Minister Birmingham explained that the report demonstrates the case for investment in research infrastructure and the need for certainty in funding for research infrastructure.

The Council accepted that research infrastructure is critically important to Australia's future, underpinning research and innovation in Australia. Members welcomed the long-term view toward research infrastructure and agreed with the need for a plan to ensure Australia has the capacity to deliver funding for research infrastructure.

The Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science welcomed the report and acknowledged the challenges linked with funding research infrastructure.

The difficulties in funding for research infrastructure, as well as the need to ensure that infrastructure can generate return on investment, were noted by the Prime Minister. He suggested that despite the difficulty in quantifying the return on investment, there is an opportunity for the Government to play a more entrepreneurial role when supporting research infrastructure.

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Members discussed opportunities to use research infrastructure as a tool to build collaboration in the broader Innovation and Science Agenda, and ways for universities, states and territories, business and industry to work together to better support research infrastructure.

The Prime Minister emphasised the need to find a way, in the interests of the nation, to do more with Government investments in research infrastructure. He invited members to consider innovative ways to provide sustainable funding for research infrastructure, including examples of business cases which could return at least the cost of capital to government, for discussion at the next meeting.

The Council noted that the Government is developing a response to the final report of the Research Infrastructure Review in the context of a national innovation and science agenda.

Agenda Item 4 – Science and Research Priorities – Capability Mapping

The Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science led discussion on capability mapping against the Science and Research Priorities.

Minister Pyne commended the capability maps and reflected that the findings show a positive overall picture for Australian research. He praised the priority setting and capability mapping process and noted the need for revisiting the exercise every two years.

Minister Pyne invited the Chief Scientist to present the outcomes of a capability mapping against Australia's performance in the national science and research priority areas.

Professor Chubb summarised the outcomes by stating that 53 per cent of the funding that could be analysed is currently directed to research aligned with the Science and Research Priorities. He also highlighted an analysis of Australia's performance in international and industrial collaboration in priority areas compared to similar countries and regional neighbours that demonstrated that Australia could improve collaboration levels, both with industry and international partners.

Members noted that current data collections are not suitable for identifying performance in relation to the practical research challenges for each priority area.

Members acknowledged that capability mapping at the level of the practical research challenges will require refinement of databases. The Council requested National Science, Technology and Research Committee to audit and refine data collections to ensure data will support assessment of investment in priority areas.

The Prime Minister mentioned that a breakdown of funding allocated outside the priority areas would complement the analysis of funding for the Science and Research Priorities.

The Council agreed that a set of fact sheets for Science and Research Priorities summarising the findings from the capability mapping exercise would be published following appropriate editing to better report the data presented.

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Agenda Item 5 – Government response to Chief Scientist's STEM report: Consultation

Discussion on a national innovation and science agenda (Item 3) covered the outcomes of the consultations on the Government's response to the suite of recommendations from the Chief Scientist's report: *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Australia's Future.*

The Council was pleased to note that the Government's response to the Chief Scientist's recommendations will be incorporated in the national innovation and science agenda.

The recommended Asian Area Research Zone initiative was discussed by the Council. The Chief Scientist explained the merits of establishing an Asian Area Research Zone by coordinating with regional neighbours to focus collaborations on shared priorities, share research infrastructure and knowledge and share costs. He emphasised the important role of Government level links with Asian nations in driving the agenda for the Australian Government and in establishing shared priorities.

Members discussed potential opportunities to leverage existing relationships with other countries to establish a research zone.

Agenda Item 6 – Update on the *Boosting the Commercial Returns from Research*

The Council noted the progress of the Government's plan to boost commercial returns from research, which was also covered during discussion on a national innovation and science agenda.

Agenda Item 7 – Other Business and Closing Remarks

Members endorsed a communiqué for the meeting, agreeing to meet in the first half of 2016.

The Prime Minister thanked members for their valuable contributions to the work of the Commonwealth Science Council in providing strategic advice on science, innovation and technology issues to the Australian Government.

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science acknowledged the important contribution of Professor Ian Chubb AC to the Council and the Australian community in his five year tenure as Chief Scientist, and thanked him for his service.

The meeting closed at 5:45pm.

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