

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY AUSTRALIA

POLICY SUBMISSION

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Strategic Examination of R&D

Issues paper 1: National coordination for RD&I impact

Science & Technology Australia (STA) thanks the Strategic Examination of R&D (SERD) Panel for the opportunity to respond to the SERD targeted issues papers.

STA is the peak body for the nation's science and technology sectors, representing nearly 150 member organisations and more than 235,000 scientists and technologists. We connect science and technology with governments, business and the community to advance science's role in solving some of humanity's greatest challenges.

What aspects of the model would work well?

A cross-jurisdictional board that oversees Australia's translational RD&I efforts would be beneficial and deliver improved cohesion and focus to Australia's R&D system. Ensuring this board is equipped with the right expertise will be critical. It must also be fully appointed at all times.

Embedding a focus area within a lead Commonwealth government agency would make sense, and contribute to the alignment of RD&I and supporting/complementary policy work within a given focus area. The lead agency will be required to provide appropriate resourcing to ensure the RD&I work is appropriately supported.

Supporting multiple 'sub-goals' within each focus area is sensible, and in theory will support a range of RD&I work. Clarity on how many sub-goals and the level of funding provided for each will be important.

The collaborative intent for sub-goal projects is sound. Project success will require clear guidelines and implementation process so that all parties are working consistently to the same timelines – industry involvement will be predicated on government partners ensuring funding certainty and timely delivery.

What could be improved and how?

Clarity is required on how the current system will be adjusted to enable the proposed structure. Assuming budget neutrality, which STA does not agree is a logical policy premise, existing funding streams will need to be repurposed and collapsed, and the SERD has not reviewed their effectiveness. The sector must be a partner in the merits of the proposed new structure compared to the status quo.

It is unclear how this structure would incorporate other strategies, e.g. the forthcoming National Health and Medical Research Strategy and the National Reconstruction Fund.

The paper notes 'Australia already has substantial activity in defence, health, agriculture, energy and resources' as the focus areas in Figure 1. This would leave significant gaps in Australia's research capability, with critical environmental research potentially ignored. The National Science and

Research Priorities should be the five focus areas, particularly given they each include critical research areas and reflect significant sector-wide consultation.

The Panel must clearly articulate how current programs will be re-directed to support the five focus areas and how the focus areas will be determined.

The paper notes the responsible Ministers would be the Ministers for Industry and Innovation; Science; and Education. If the focus areas are the ones proposed in Figure 1, it would be an absurd oversight to exclude the Ministers for Health; Agriculture; Resources; Energy and Defence as the responsible authority for a focus area in their own portfolio. The Minister for Education, while responsible for universities has no direct role with any focus area, so it's challenging to understand why they would hold a crucial decision-making role. **Focus area oversight must involve relevant portfolio Ministers.**

We are hesitant on the proposed structure as it seems overly bureaucratic, particularly given the desire to ensure 'funds target RD&I activity rather than administration'. The secretariat seems unnecessary as lead government agencies could provide the required support. The current IISA secretarial support could be redirected to support the cross-jurisdictional board.

The cross-jurisdictional board must have deep expertise spanning the entire RD&I system.

Enhancing the IISA board with discovery-based experts could achieve this. While restructuring the IISA Board to have this wider responsibility should also be moved, along with the NSTC and Office of Chief Scientist, under PM&C for an all-of-government and economy perspective.

It's entirely unclear how the proposed structure would 'safeguard the core foundations of Australia's R&D system' including investigator-led research and research infrastructure or that the cross-jurisdictional board would have the required expertise. **Discovery research funding through the ARC and NHMRC must not be subsumed into these translational focus areas – these must be excluded from the proposed structure.**

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