



4 March 2015

**Open letter to the Prime Minister of Australia:
Australia's national public research infrastructure preparing for shutdown**

Dear Prime Minister

We, the undersigned members of the National Research Alliance are writing to alert you to the damage being caused to significant public infrastructure by the continued uncertainty over operational funding for the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS).

Since 2004, NCRIS and its predecessor program has sensibly and successfully guided Australia's national research infrastructure investment; committing over \$2 billion of taxpayer money to 27 major research facilities. Together, these facilities:

- allow Australia's scientists to undertake world-class research;
- enable significant science industry linkage, including the capacity for innovative Australian companies to access high-tech infrastructure; and
- facilitate international research collaboration, which provide substantial economic and intellectual value to Australia.

Over 35,000 Australian and international researchers use NCRIS facilities, and the 27 national facilities employ over 1,700 highly skilled scientists, and support and management staff. The facilities underpin much of Australia's \$30 billion annual spend on science, research and development at an operational cost of just \$150 million per annum (0.5% of total, and 1.6% of the Australian Government science funding).

As with any major public infrastructure, the NCRIS facilities depend on secure funding to enable forward planning and efficient operation. **However, with continued uncertainty over the 2015-16 operational funding included in the last budget, many of the NCRIS facilities are preparing to close.**

The damage to Australia's domestic and collaborative international research effort that will result from such closures is immense. Continuity and productivity of critical research programs will be set back by several years, with some innovative Australian companies will be forced to take their operations offshore, many profitable international research collaborations will cease, and 1,700 highly skilled NCRIS staff could become unemployed.

Importantly, with just four months until the end of the financial year, the uncertainty is already having an impact. Many NCRIS staff have been put on provisional notice of termination, and the consequent exodus of highly specialised skills has begun and will only accelerate as the end of the year draws closer.

Furthermore, many of the facilities cannot be viably maintained if taken offline for significant periods. This means that if operational funding for 2015-16 is not confirmed in the next two months, the Government will be effectively decommissioning high-cost public infrastructure that in many cases has years if not decades of productive working life remaining.

The National Research Alliance urges the Government to fulfil its responsibility to fund the NCRIS program in 2015-16, and to use the NCRIS review that is already underway as an opportunity to find a long-term funding solution for research infrastructure in Australia.

If this does not happen, the locking of lab doors, the mothballing of world class facilities and the retrenching of specialist scientists and research staff will inevitably begin soon.

Yours sincerely



Dr Ross Smith, President, Science and Technology Australia



Dr John Beaton, Executive Director, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia



Professor Doug Hilton, President, Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI)



Ms Vicki Thomson, Chief Executive, The Group of Eight



Dr Margaret Hartley, Chief Executive, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering



Dr Caroline Perkins, Executive Director, Regional Universities Network



Dr Tony Peacock, Chief Executive, Cooperative Research Centres Association



Ms Belinda Robinson, Chief Executive, Universities Australia



Ms Renee Hindmarsh, Executive Director, Australian Technology Network



Professor Andrew Holmes, President, Australian Academy of Science



Ms Robyn Porter, President, Professional Scientists Australia



Dr Phoebe Phillips, President, Australian Society for Medical Research



Elizabeth Foley, CEO and managing Director, Research Australia



Mr Conor King, Executive Director, Innovative Research Universities



Professor John Fitzgerald FAHA, President, Australian Academy of the Humanities

cc:

Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Employment
Attorney-General
Treasurer
Minister for Agriculture
Minister for Education and Training
Minister for Indigenous Affairs
Minister for Industry and Science

Minister for Communications
Minister for Health
Minister for Small Business
Minister for Trade and Investment
Minister for Defence
Minister for the Environment
Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
Minister for Finance

The National Research Alliance was established in 2013 as a broad-based grouping of Australia's scientific, university and public and private sector research organisations, each of which is concerned about the scientific and financial loss that would be incurred by the nation should the NCRIS program be discontinued.