

# News Notes

Date: 2 September 2010

  
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## Science infrastructure to be reviewed next year

Bernard Lane

430 words

1 September 2010

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A PLAN that brought a new level of sophistication to investment in research infrastructure will be revisited next year. The strategic roadmap, which has guided funding in fields as diverse as astronomy and nanotechnology, was last revised in 2008.

Next year's review could take six to eight months. Cathy Foley, president of the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, welcomed it, saying: "So far, the roadmap has been very successful in breaking down silos, enabling Australia to make strategic investments in areas of need, which would not have been possible without a collaborative approach."

The 2011 roadmap will be drawn up without a specific pot of money in mind, although the fate of what remains in the Education Investment Fund is unclear.

The Super Science initiative, part of the economic stimulus, made use of the 2008 roadmap. The first roadmap, drawn up in 2006, identified research capabilities, such as **biotechnology** products and marine observation, and went with a \$542 million funding program, the 2005-2011 National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy.

Les Field, deputy vice-chancellor (research) at the University of NSW and research spokesman for the Group of Eight universities, called for a longer-term commitment to funding infrastructure. "It is ridiculous that the NCRIS program, where we invested heavily in major infrastructure, simply fell off the end of a cliff at the end of five years," he said.

Despite this, he was hopeful the NCRIS process would be reformed. "The original roadmap and decision-making process was criticised heavily for not involving the existing research frameworks (universities, CSIRO, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation) but attempting to harvest information and direction through informal user networks," Professor Field said. "There were strong criticisms of bias, favouritism and a lack of transparency and process."

But Bob Williamson, science policy secretary for the Australian Academy of Science, said "the scientific community felt the NCRIS funds were spent very wisely".

When next year's roadmap is put to use, results from the new quality measurement system, Excellence in Research for Australia, could help to identify where expertise is concentrated and thereby influence the siting of facilities, the HES understands.

Andrew Cheetham, Universities Australia spokesman on research and pro vice-chancellor (research) at the University of Western Sydney, had a reservation about this: "ERA was not designed to identify strong areas in multi-disciplinary research. Since nearly all of the really interesting research these days is multi-disciplinary . . . you want to make sure you don't lose that [when siting infrastructure]."