



The Place To Be

Media release

From the Minister for Innovation

Tuesday, 20 April, 2010

VISION FOR THE FUTURE PROVIDES JOBS AND ECONOMIC BOOST

Up to 90 jobs will be created and \$70 million injected into Victoria's economy over the next four years as a result of one of the Melbourne-based bionic eye projects.

Innovation Minister Gavin Jennings said the return to Victoria from a \$60,000 Brumby Labor Government grant to the Bionic Vision Australia (BVA) consortium in 2008 shows how important it is for the Government to assist local innovators develop their ideas.

"The 90 jobs that will be created and the \$70 million spent in Victoria as a direct result of this one investment from the Brumby Labor Government proves that our support of local innovators is money very well spent," Mr Jennings said.

"The \$60,000 in grants funding was provided to BVA to assist in developing a business plan to secure Federal Government funding. On the back of that, researchers received a \$42 million grant from the Federal Government to develop the prototype.

"The economic stimulation for Victoria from the bionic eye initiative reflects the forward thinking of the Brumby Labor Government in its funding for collaborations and world-class research facilities in life sciences.

"Our investment into biotechnology is essential if we are to improve the health of Victorians and create new industries and jobs."

Mr Jennings said the BVA jobs are focused on device development, surgery and clinical research, and administration and regulatory development.

"They are critical to the success of the program as they provide vital support to the biomedical researchers, clinical neurosurgeons and ophthalmologists already working on the Bionic Vision Australia project," Mr Jennings said.

"This project will enhance Victoria's reputation as a life sciences capital where 22,000 people are currently employed in the biotech sector."

BVA's prototype concept for a bionic eye involves an implant placed in the eye which is connected to a tiny video camera attached to the middle of a pair of sunglasses. Researchers hope to place the implant in the first recipient within three years.

Mr Jennings today met with the Victorian scientific delegation to Bio 2010 in Chicago at Government House. Governor, Professor David De Kretser AC, is representing Victoria and leading the Victorian delegation.

Since 1999, the Victorian Government has invested more than \$3.4 billion on innovation-related initiatives, including biotech.

The BVA consortium is a partnership between the University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales, the Victoria Research Laboratory of National ICT Australia (NICTA) and Melbourne's Bionic Ear Institute and Centre for Eye Research Australia.

Research Director of Bionic Vision Australia Professor Anthony Burkitt said the support from both the Victorian Government and Federal Government was already paying dividends.

“Yet again the world is watching our life scientists working on the bionic eye which is set to join other Victorian innovations that have been successfully commercialised ranging from Relenza to the bionic ear,” Professor Burkitt said.

Monash University is leading a second consortium out of Victoria to develop a bionic eye system which stimulates the visual cortex of the brain. This project could potentially help around 80 per cent of chronically-blind people.

Federal Government funding of \$8 million was recently announced for the project under the Australian Research Council’s *Research in Bionic Vision Science and Technology Initiative*.

The Monash-based team includes engineers, physiologists, medical experts and researchers, mathematicians and partners MiniFAB, Grey Innovation and The Alfred Hospital. Their hope is to create a company with a large global market which will create hundreds of jobs within Victoria.