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Manufacturing taskforce an opportunity for life science sector

AusBiotech will be lobbying for a greater emphasis on biopharma and medical devices on the newly established Prime Minister's Taskforce on Manufacturing.

Tim Dean (Australian Life Scientist) | 01 December, 2011 15:18 | [Comments](#) | [Like](#)

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The Prime Minister's Taskforce on Manufacturing, which met for the first time today in Canberra, has as its main focus 'traditional' manufacturing, although AusBiotech will be working with the Taskforce to emphasise the challenges and opportunities inherent in the life science manufacturing sector.

The Taskforce includes representatives from the manufacturing sector, unions and the research sector, along with the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and Ministers for: Innovation, Industry, Science and Research; Finance and Deregulation; Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations; Trade; and Defence Materiel.

The Taskforce's stated purpose is to "secure a strong future for Australian manufacturing and its workforce."

In the first meeting the members of the Taskforce agreed to a basic roadmap focusing on:

- The short term and long-term competitiveness of the Australian manufacturing sector;
- An analysis of the pressures and possible adjustments facing the sector resulting from the influence of the Australian dollar and the international economy;
- Improved access to capital, markets, research and innovation, and skills to underpin a more competitive and successful manufacturing sector;
- Maximising opportunities for Australian manufacturers resulting from the rise of Asia;
- Addressing regulatory and other barriers to the growth of the manufacturing sector;
- Building stronger partnerships between SMEs, larger companies, research partners and governments to underpin a more research and innovation focussed manufacturing sector; and
- The development of a roadmap outlining a shared vision and direction for Australian manufacturing over the next decade.

According to AusBiotech CEO Dr Anna Lavelle, while the Taskforce presently has an emphasis on traditional manufacturing, such as steel and automotive, she hopes to be able to promote the opportunities in the life science manufacturing sector.

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"This is a very necessary initiative from the Prime Minister's office, and we're looking forward to participating," she said.

"Currently about \$1 billion in export revenues come from the medical device sector, and about \$4 billion from biopharma. So currently the biopharma sector is larger than car or wine exports, and not many people are aware of that.

"At AusBiotech, we're having an internal consultation on medical technology on the 9th of December. From that we'll develop our platform that we'll take into the discussion we have with the Taskforce during the consultation process."

While the medical devices manufacturing industry is presently dominated by two companies – Cochlear and ResMed – Lavelle emphasised that there are many new and innovative companies that could potentially compete on the world stage if they are given sufficient support from the government.

Such companies could also provide a home for workers transitioning from traditional manufacturing, such as automotive, where skills such as machining and rapid prototyping can be translated into the medical devices field, she said.

The Taskforce acknowledged the key role of science and technology in successful Australian firms. Members agreed on the importance of building closer linkages and collaboration between industry and the research community, and developing better access for Australian business to global supply chains.

The next meeting of the Taskforce will be in early 2012, and will consider the results of targeted consultations with the manufacturing sector, work on the draft roadmap for manufacturing and a paper on market opportunities in the Asian economy as part of the White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century process.

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