

# Meeting the challenge

## Opposition to ban on gene patents

JULIAN SWALLOW

**A**USTRALIA'S biotechnology industry has a bright future due to its innovative approach and global outlook, industry body AusBiotech says.

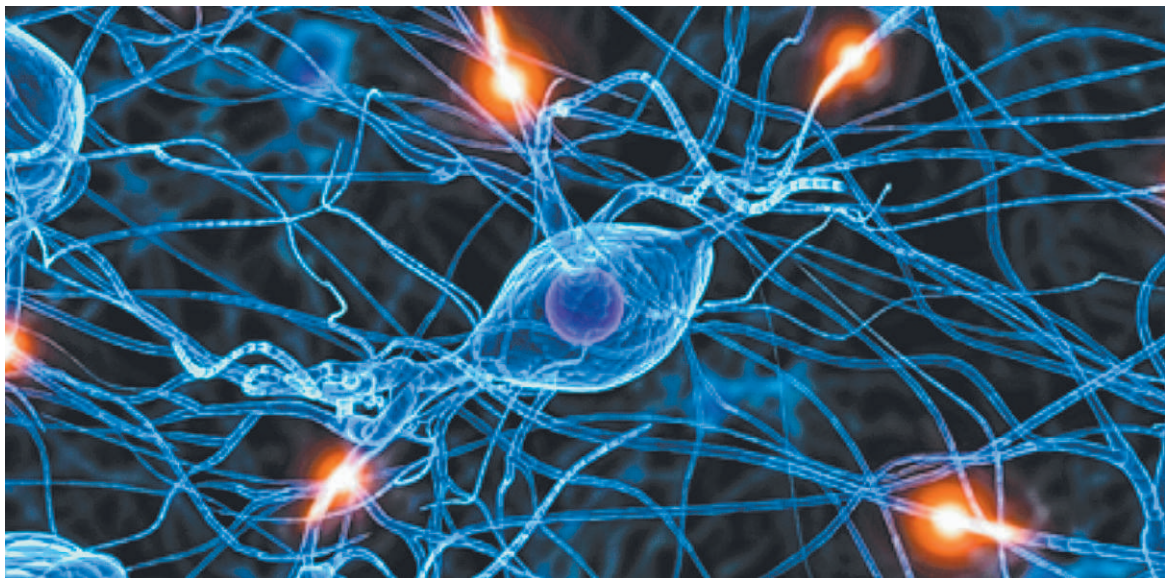
Chief executive Dr Anna Lavelle said Australia now boasts about 400 biotechnology companies and another 500-600 medical technology firms, including global giants such as CSL, Cochlear and ResMed.

Dr Lavelle said Australian biotechnology companies have a total capitalisation of about \$35 billion and this is set to grow as the industry meets the needs of an expanding middle class in emerging markets such as China and India, along with the fundamental challenges of our age.

"Biotechnology is one of the only industries that touches on all the main things the community is concerned about," Dr Lavelle said. These include health, food security, biofuels, and the challenge posed by climate change.

Dr Lavelle said the global focus of the Australian biotechnology industry had helped to make Australia the fifth-largest player in the international biotechnology sector.

"If there was an Olympics in biotech, Australia would be in the medals," she said. But with the cost of developing a new medication in the range of \$1



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billion to \$1.5 billion, Dr Lavelle said the Australian biotechnology industry required ongoing financial support.

While much of its funding comes from private sector backers such as "angel investors", venture capitalists and global pharmaceutical giants, she said government support was critical.

"You've got to have both sides working together," she said.

The South Australian Government has established BioInnovation SA to foster the state's biotechnology industry, while Dr Lavelle said a new national research and development tax credit will provide a significant boost.

These are issues that will be discussed at the AusBiotech 2011 national conference in Adelaide, which opens this Sunday and runs until October 19.

It includes the Australasian Life Sciences Investment Summit where 40 of Australia's best local companies are showcased to investors.

While Australia relies on mining and agriculture for much of its wealth, Dr Lavelle said biotechnology will only become more important. "We need to think about what are the industries for the next 20 or 30 years," she said.

THE biotech industry has welcomed a Senate report that recommends a Bill seeking to ban the patenting of biological material not be passed.

A Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee Inquiry recommended the rejection of the cross-party Patent Amendment (Human Genes and Biological Materials) Bill 2010, which aims to ban patents on human genes and similar materials.

AusBiotech chief Dr Anna Lavelle welcomed the recommendation:

"The Bill does not serve the interests of patients, researchers nor industry," Dr Lavelle said.

"In fact, (it) threatens the very foundations of scientific research and development of biological therapies and other technologies built on patents."

Watermark Patent and Trade Marks Attorney Dr John Golding also supported the recommendation.

"This is an important decision for an industry where a company's intellectual assets represent a significant component in value and market capitalisation," he said.

Dr Golding said the biotech industry did support new patent protection legislation being considered by Parliament that will reform Australia's intellectual property system, encouraging investment in research and technology.

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very positive / positive impact on 'growth strategy' <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Independent Survey, Newfocus, 09/2010

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