

# **Submission Template**

## **2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap**

### **Capability Issues Paper**

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I would like to put forward comments in a general sense regarding the National Research Infrastructure framework, and how it is positioned within Australia's research and business communities, and how it contributes to Australia's growth.

My background in this area is through being part of a MNRF/NCRIS/BPA funded capability, the Australian Proteome Analysis Facility. The company I am part of, TGR, was part of the original APAF consortium, which was quite successful in generating technology innovations and commercial outcomes. TGR was the original Adelaide node of APAF, which developed high throughput protein analysis technology for biological active protein detection, and provided services to external groups with this developed technology. TGR is no longer funded by BPA in any way, but we remain in close touch with BPA in an informal way. TGR has since expanded its protein technology base, is a profitable company, and continues to service discovery science on a world-wide basis through provision of commercial test kits, largely for drug discovery programs.

The current BPA, in my view, is performing very well, and has developed appropriate strategic directions and funding priorities, in association with the Federal Government. I see the continuation of BPA as being essential to the NRI effort.

I believe, however, that change is required in a more structural way in how NRI-funded institutions interact with external bodies, and the overall goals of these NRI-funded institutions as well as those of Australia's academic institutions that utilize the NRI capabilities.

I see the future important relevance of NRI-funded institutions as support for the growth of Australia's commercial sector. I see little justification in NRI-funded institutions in becoming quasi University departments, which I feel has occurred in part of the biological areas. In particular, I feel that several NRI-funded institutions tend to service the requirements of internal university/NHMRC/ARC funded research, rather than really being a national resource.

Ultimately, in my view, it is the commercial sector that will provide national benefit. It is the commercial sector that needs to grow and take innovation to the world with the financial reward coming back to Australia in taxation revenue. There are obvious benefits, often articulated, in the commercial sector reaping the rewards of innovation. The question is how this can be better achieved than it is now.

I do not believe it is the Universities that can or should drive this. It is the pull of the commercial sector that should drive relevant projects, but this can/should be in association with research groups

that can provide a clearly-defined benefit to the commercial outcome. Thus, funding/access to NRI-funded programs should be strictly based on clear, externally-reviewed funding criteria. There will be IP issues to sort out with each application, but these can be managed.

Universities, quite rightly, are always driven by the need to publish. They are not driven by commercial outcomes, despite the small changes that have occurred in this regard over recent years. Therefore, they should not be the ones driving project plans using NRI-funded capabilities. Universities should continue to derive their funds for their own research projects through the traditional research funding agencies.

There is rarely a clear business case / clear outcome-driven model of commercialisation coming out of university-driven “commercial” grant applications. TGR is frequently asked to participate/co-fund university group-initiated “commercial” projects, but these have never an associated business case of any merit.

The challenge will be to increase awareness, access, and utilisation of the NRI-funded capabilities by companies, and to set up a coherent framework where those university researchers that want to participate in true commercial work can do so and contribute in a more meaningful way to commercial outcomes. If Australia, and its commercial sector, does not address this shortfall, there is little justification in providing an ever-growing infrastructure system that continues to provide new knowledge with little commercial outcome. This is not to deride the clear benefits of basic research, which should continue to be funded through established means.