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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

**AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH
COUNCIL AMENDMENT BILL 2010**

SPEECH

Wednesday, 17 March 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker Rishworth, Amanda, MP	Question No.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (10.53 am)—I too rise to support the Australian Research Council Amendment Bill 2010 because it really does demonstrate this government's commitment to fostering local research and increasing Australia's capacity for developing innovative solutions to modern problems. For Australia to remain competitive in this era of globalisation, it must be smarter and more innovative. Australia's contribution to the global body of knowledge has been and is substantial. For example, Howard Florey, a fellow Adelaidean, was instrumental in the development of penicillin, the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories contributed significantly to the development of the modern cochlear implant and the CSIRO's substantial body of achievements range from everyday conveniences such as Aeroguard through to developing wireless local area network technology that is now the world standard used by millions of homes and offices to access the internet. The CSIRO is now working on new technology to ensure that people in remote and isolated communities can have access to high-speed internet on a more cost-effective basis than fibre optic cable. These are examples of previous innovations and previous issues that have been researched by great Australians and have really contributed to the global body of research.

We need to continue this push: we need to push forward on new frontiers of science if we are going to remain competitive and innovative. This has a huge impact not only in the areas of science; it is also so important for the commercialisation of those ideas to actually go forward and provide real jobs and real niches for people within our community.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the minister responsible not only for this bill and amendment today but also for the innovation review that he conducted. This innovation review was very broad reaching, and really did a lot to look at how we can be a more innovative country and be a world leader in many areas. This is a very important bill to complement that and therefore I will go through a little bit about what the bill will do. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the work of Professor Margaret Shiel, the CEO of the ARC, and her team at the Australian Research Council for their expertise and diligence in ensuring that public money reaches projects that will benefit the nation.

I wholeheartedly agree with the words of Senator Carr who, when announcing the new Independent Australian Research Council Advisory Council, stated:

Research is a matter of vital national importance, the outcomes of which have a significant impact on Australia's ongoing prosperity ...

Just to illustrate this, I will mention two projects that the ARC is currently funding that do have that national importance and relevance to my local area.

Late last year the Australian Research Council announced approximately \$21 million for researchers in South Australia. That money will go to 66 projects, including a study into the environmental variability in South Australia's Lower Lakes. Any person who has kept an eye on issues in South Australia will know that the plight of the Lower Lakes is one of the important and desperate areas that need to be addressed. We have seen a drought along the Murray-Darling system that has left the end of the system very much compromised. So having a study that will look at this—the variability and the ecology of the area and how that is responding to the drought—will also have the potential to lead to new innovative practices to ensure we can restore this important local, and also national, asset.

That is one of the programs. As water is such an important issue in South Australia I also want to mention another of the ARC projects there: the work that is being undertaken by the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training, supported by the ARC grants. This project is carrying out research to better understand how to manage Australia's subsurface water systems and ways to harness this resource for the benefit of farmers and agricultural communities. They are also looking at the interaction between surface and subsurface water systems and how to give comprehensive advice to policy makers and local communities to ensure that our scarcest

resource is managed properly. These are two examples of research that has been funded partly publicly by the ARC that are really going to solve important issues of our time.

I am very pleased that this bill is making available over \$800 million more in the forward estimates to actually do a number of things. The first is to provide indexation to some of the competitive grants. It will also deliver on the commitment we made in the budget about some specific targeted areas. I will speak about those briefly.

The first has been mentioned by previous speakers. This budget initiative and this bill go towards funding the Super Science Fellowships Scheme, which will consist of 100 three-year early career fellowships to be awarded to Australia's most promising young researchers. This is really important because previously the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation, after a long inquiry, found that there did need to be support for early career scientists because they were being lost—either going outside of the research area into other industries or leaving the country. This is very, very important to encourage those brightest scientists to continue on in the research field and contribute to Australia's innovation agenda.

This is very important bill. These fellowships will target the areas in which Australia excels. The innovation review in its report, *Powering ideas: an innovation agenda for the 21st century*, recommended that fellowships be offered in three targeted areas: space science astronomy, marine and climate sciences, and future industry research of biotechnology and nanotechnology. These are all cutting-edge research areas in which Australia already does well. We can continue to push the boundaries. These fellowships will go a long way to help to do that.

The second area relates to funding for the National ICT Australia organisation, which was recommended as part of the 2020 Summit. NICTA is an institution that does a huge amount in research and innovation in the area of ICT. Supporting it will enhance Australia's ability to fully capture the social and economic benefits that ICT capability can deliver across all sectors. Already we have seen the previous generation of research into ICT being rolled out in Australia under the National Broadband Network. I am very pleased that Willunga in my electorate was chosen as the first places in Australia to have a demonstration site of fibre to the house. That technology I know will make a huge contribution to connecting people socially. I have already had people with a disability talking about how having fast internet will revolutionise their lives—they will be able to connect with more people and they will feel less isolated. Obviously the economic benefits of the National Broadband Network are evident, with businesses being able to compete more in a global market. We are seeing the rollout of technology that will revolutionise our lives. Pushing that frontier forward under the National ICT Australia to develop global advances in ICT I think is incredibly important. This bill will make available money for this organisation. This was not only a recommendation made at the 2020 Summit but also a commitment we made. As the previous speaker mentioned, National ICT Australia has the aim of becoming one of the 10 best research institutes across the globe. Certainly I, along with the previous speaker, would like to see that supported.

The third objective of this bill is to provide funding for the Research in Bionic Vision Science and Technology Initiative. It also delivers on the government's promise as part of the 2020 Summit response to implement a long-term national health strategy. This research has the potential to give and restore sight to thousands of people around the world. Once again, this is an example of cutting-edge research being conducted in Australia that will have the potential to change lives not just in Australia but across the world.

In conclusion, this is an important bill and an important complement to our significant revolution in the area of research under Minister Carr, who has been really looking at how we can best foster innovation in Australia. This bill, along with the many other initiatives taken, will help Australia to become a real player into the future and enable it to hold its head high on the international stage. I commend the bill to the House.