

Science – it's in our national interest

- Properly funding science and R&D is central to the Federal Government's commitment to innovation as a key driver of economic growth and increasing our competitiveness in the global economy.
- Investment in science and R&D must be increased for us to remain internationally competitive.
- Public support of science and engineering research is an investment that generates economic growth and encourages concurrent business investment.
- Under-investment in public science and R&D reduces our innovative capability and potential for economic growth.

Why invest in science and R&D?

Investing in science and R&D is critical because:

- Investing in the science and research workforce is about investing in national productivity. Governments are in a unique position to create a policy environment which encourages industry to invest more in research and makes Australia a go-to destination for international companies to undertake research.
- A sustainable and vibrant STEM workforce is essential to almost every aim we have as a nation.
- The social benefits generated by Australia's public funding support of science are significant and investment in science and R&D over time outweighs the cost.
- Long-term strategically-based investment by both government and business is essential if we are to compete globally and in our region. This includes a balance of investment and research in non-mining business activities as well as in natural resources.
- There is a shift to knowledge-based jobs with the decline of the manufacturing and mining sectors and a knowledge-based economy is largely built on the STEM skills of its workforce. The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) suggests that 75 per cent of the fastest-growing occupations require well-developed STEM skills and knowledge.
- Investment in science infrastructure that supports research across a range of areas yields benefits beyond their actual cost.

What are the risks attached to cutbacks?

Even where funding is maintained, the impact of inflation means diminishing actual spend on science and R&D. With other nations increasing their actual spend, it becomes essential that we increase our public investment in science just to maintain our position and ensure we remain globally competitive.

Funding cutbacks made without a detailed understanding of an agency or organisation's specialist expertise and collaborative engagements can result in a lack of understanding about the extent of lost capabilities and whether or not remaining capabilities will be sufficient to continue the required work at the appropriate levels.

Governments have a responsibility to act in the interests of the wider public in terms of public safety, public health and the public interest and government budgeting needs to operate from a cost base which protects this position.

What is the current funding situation?

Australia currently invests around 2.2 per cent of our GDP in research putting us just below the middle of the OECD table. But the stop/start nature of funding in the recent past means we are sliding backwards and will continue to do so unless action is taken. Australia should rightly aspire to being in the top half of the OECD table and increasing funding to 2.4% would achieve that. Professionals Australia calls on the federal Government to work toward increasing investment to 2.4%.