



Australian Government

Department of Education, Science and Training

Our Ref : ES06/08569

Professor Stewart Campbell
President
Australian Neutron Beam Users Group

Copies to: Professor Simon Ringer, Dr Richard Garret, Mr John Kelly, Dr Kath Smith, Dr Roger Smart, Professor John White, Dr Rob Robinson

Dear Professor Campbell

I refer to your letter of 16 August regarding the indicative NCRIS funding for 'characterisation' recently agreed by the NCRIS Committee.

With regard to the indicative funding envelope for 'characterisation', the NCRIS Committee supports the development of world-class capability in neutron scattering and X-ray techniques and acknowledges their importance to a broad range of researchers. As you note, the Committee has indicated that, contingent on the development of a satisfactory investment plan, it is likely to recommend funding for a deuteration facility that will significantly enhance opportunities to access and use the OPAL research reactor.

While I am aware that the indicative allocation does not meet all the aspirations of the OPAL user community, the Committee notes that both OPAL and the Australian Synchrotron are large-scale, 'landmark' facilities.

It has been clear from the outset that it is not the function of NCRIS to fund the establishment or ongoing development and operation of such facilities. The Committee's view is that these needs should be addressed in the context of specific plans for these facilities, funded from appropriate sources. Nevertheless the Committee felt that the targeted allocations outlined above were important and justified as an interim measure.

You might also note that there has been strong demand for NCRIS funding to support enhanced research capability in a range of priority areas. The NCRIS Committee has a responsibility to develop a portfolio of investments in response to a broad range of national objectives.

I also note your concerns regarding the funding of access costs including travel and accommodation to landmark facilities such as OPAL and the Australian Synchrotron.

The NCRIS Committee has considered the issue of travel costs incurred in accessing NCRIS-funded infrastructure. The Committee's view is that given Australia's plural funding system and the funding constraints on the NCRIS programme, that NCRIS funding should not be applied to these access costs. More broadly, it is the view of the Committee that access costs are rightly an issue for research project and institutional funding, not infrastructure funding.

The facilitators, including Professor Ringer, were provided with this advice early in the facilitation process and were asked to liaise with the research community on this basis.

Nevertheless, the NCRIS Committee recognises that funding for travel and access costs is an important issue. For this reason, the Committee has initiated discussion with stakeholders, including the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council, to advance consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "M. A. Sargent".

Dr Mike Sargent
Chair
NCRIS Committee

20 September 2006