



Public Support for Science and Innovation: Productivity Commission

The Desert Knowledge CRC welcomes the broad view of the Productivity Commission report regarding the benefits arising from Research and Development, especially the strong focus on economic, social and environmental outcomes and the national benefit arising from this research. We also support the strong focus on utilisation of research rather than solely considering commercialisation.

The Desert Knowledge CRC supports the overall conclusion of the draft report that there is no reason to make large changes to the overall level of public spending but there is a need for incremental shifts in how it is spent.

There are some issues that specifically relate to desert Australia that the Desert Knowledge CRC wishes to clarify in order to achieve the best research outcomes.

Commercialisation

The Productivity Commission report represents a shift away from government supporting commercialisation focussed research to a greater balance between research and commercial research. The Desert Knowledge CRC supports this approach, as the centre ensures that all of our research has a commercialisation and utilisation focus. We believe that a balance between the two research streams is an effective way to deliver on the national research priorities.

The Desert Knowledge CRC has extensive engagement with industries and business of a variety of sizes and interests. The building of relationships between these organisations and a CRC is difficult, as CRCs operate under organisational models that many institutions, including government departments, are unfamiliar with. We believe that the links between industry, government and a CRC is critical to the Australian Research and Development priorities and should be encouraged, not reduced. As such, we believe the report's concerns regarding subsidies to business collaborators are overstated.

Stronger relationships and a focus on utilisation and commercialisation allow the Desert Knowledge CRC to establish a research centre in the desert that is meaningful and beneficial in tangible and intangible ways for the real stakeholders of desert knowledge, desert people.

Cooperative Research Centres

The Desert Knowledge CRC strongly supports the Productivity Commission's findings that the objectives of Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) should be re-aligned to the broad attainment of economic, social and environmental goals, not just commercial ones.

The Desert Knowledge CRC believes that while a flexible organisational structure for CRCs is ideal, the often complicated aims and nature of CRCs does require levels of formality to ensure that all participants benefit from their involvement in the programme. We believe that there are ways to allow flexibility within the programme without compromising the long-term research priorities but that the essence of a CRC as an intermediary between government and industry must not be compromised.

Cross-sectoral research and relationship building

The Productivity Commission report does not emphasise the significance of engagement between research institutions, government, industry, NGOs and SMEs. The Desert Knowledge CRC's

participants, of which many are SMEs including some Aboriginal communities, are some of the country's most diverse organisations. It is a valuable achievement in its own right to bring government, business, academic institutions, small business and Aboriginal organisations and communities together. This is hard work, but has enormous social, economic and environmental benefits to Australia.

Relationship building is integral to the CRC programme and is a major reason for the high overheads associated with CRCs, especially the Desert Knowledge CRC with its mandate of research across desert Australia. The recent 'Collaborating across the sectors' report demonstrates the long-term importance of this engagement and the possibilities for ground-breaking cross-sectoral research if relationships are managed well.

Overall, the Desert Knowledge CRC welcomes the Productivity Commission's draft report into public support for science and innovation. We believe that this report holds the balance between commercialisation and utilisation about right and look forward to many more years researching in the desert.

Jan Ferguson
Managing Director
Desert Knowledge CRC

