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Public Support for Science and Innovation
Productivity Commission PO Box 80
Belconnen ACT 2616

ANZAAS (The Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science) is a national organization, with a federal council of delegates from state divisions. ANZAAS has made a submission to the Productivity Commission on the Draft Research Report on 'Public Support for Science and Innovation'. The NSW Division of ANZAAS fully endorses this submission, but would like to make a brief submission drawing attention to some particular issues in NSW.

State governments have a long history of support for scientific research. The NSW Department of Primary Industry has one of the largest employers of scientists in the country, with an outstanding reputation for high quality research, particularly in support of agriculture. The Australian Museum and the National Herbarium at the Royal Botanic Garden are two of the oldest research institutions in Australia, and are at the forefront of research documenting biodiversity. While these are State funded organizations, the research they conduct contributes to national, and in some cases international, programmes.

However, NSW provides relatively little support, compared to other states, to universities, nor has it invested in major research infrastructure projects to the extent that both Victoria and Queensland have in recent years.

We commend these states for their commitment to research. Major scientific infrastructure can be very expensive and it would be difficult to justify, for example more than one synchrotron in the country. Inevitably there will be differences between states, but if one state is a persistent underperformer in provision of funding, this is likely to have repercussions on tertiary institutions within the state, in terms of provisions of and access to facilities, and in terms of employment opportunities for graduates. The Commonwealth cannot direct states to spend money on science, but recognition of the current differences in expenditure will need to be part of the development of national science policy.

Differences in regulations regimes between states also affect the conduct of research. This can include the uncertainty caused by the absence of regulation. One of the major research opportunities for Australia is the exploration of the properties of our unique biota. While there are protocols covering access to the genetic resources of native species for Commonwealth lands or Queensland there is a major lacuna in NSW. There have been a number of inquiries which have pointed this out, but there has been no change in the situation. The absence of uniform regime not only creates uncertainty, it also results in inefficiency. To maximize the benefits of public support for science it would be preferable if there were a national level playing field.

These are matters which may be outside the Commission's terms of reference, but we would suggest that integrative measures are required to achieve better collaboration amongst the States and between the States and the Commonwealth to ensure the most efficient use of the public investment in scientific research.

Assoc. Prof. Paul Adam

Chair