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MEDIA RELEASE

RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE ROADMAP MUST HELP US PREPARE AND NAVIGATE THE NCRIS FUNDING CLIFF AND HARD CHOICES

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Australia must secure the future of its critical research infrastructure and make clear investment choices before an approaching funding cliff puts decades of capability at risk.

Responding to the 2026 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap Exposure Draft, Science & Technology Australia (STA) welcomed its ambition but warned the final document must provide a much stronger, detailed framework to guide tangible national investment planning.

STA CEO Ryan Winn said funding uncertainty beyond 2028-29 for the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) made the task urgent.

"Australia's national research infrastructure enables the leading-edge discoveries that improve our health, strengthen industry and help us respond to economic, environmental and national security challenges," Mr Winn said.

"We need long-term funding certainty, alongside a clear-eyed assessment of the national research infrastructure capabilities Australia must sustain, where we need to expand, how much funding will ensure sustainability, and what needs to change."

STA's submission argues the exposure draft falls short in identifying sufficiently clear, whole of system priorities at a sufficient level of detail to guide those decisions.

Mr Winn said the final Roadmap must give the Australian Government and the research sector a practical basis for making difficult choices.

"A credible Roadmap must do more than describe what Australia could invest in. It must help us decide what we must and should invest in – what we need to keep, new capabilities we need to establish, and what might now be superseded or no longer needed at a national level to deliver the greatest national benefit," he said.

"Some capabilities will need to grow. Others may need to, sometimes unfortunately, be transformed or retired so limited resources can support emerging priorities. Those decisions must be transparent, informed by evidence and focused on the capabilities Australia needs and against a publicly available and robust set of criteria for prioritisation."

STA welcomes the system-wide approach the Exposure Draft calls for and urges the Government to establish the proposed research infrastructure subcommittee of the National Resilience and Science Council, with the expertise, resources and authority to coordinate investment across Government portfolios and their various funding vehicles.

"National research infrastructure serves national needs and includes investments and assets across departmental boundaries, especially relevant for the proposed near-term priority of collections. Planning and investment decisions must reflect that," Mr Winn said.

STA is also calling for the immediate publication of an audit of national research infrastructure capabilities based on existing information available, with this to be enhanced and reviewed annually, to enable a clear assessment of current capabilities, identify gaps and help prioritise future investments.

The assessment should examine the specific research capabilities Australia needs, recognising that a single facility can support several capabilities, including across various locations and hosts through a distributed network, each with potentially different investment priorities.

"We need a national view of what we have, what we are missing and where investment will make the greatest difference, including in cross cutting digital and workforce needs. Stronger oversight would help Government make those choices coherently across the system."

Given the wealth of information and the challenges for Australia's national high-performance computing (HPC) capacity, the final Roadmap must identify the immediate and quantifiable capability uplift needed in Tier 1 HPC, not just a plan for a plan.

"Equipment, computing, data and skilled people all need to be planned and supported together," Mr Winn said.

"These facilities, and the specialist expertise behind them, take decades to build. They cannot be switched on and off as funding cycles come and go. We cannot afford to lose the specialists who make these facilities work or allow computing constraints to hold back Australian research.

"This Roadmap is an opportunity to build on the success of NCRIS and strengthen the broader national research infrastructure system, including aspects in the public funded research agencies. It must deliver the direction and certainty needed to turn that ambition into lasting national capability."

Media note
Download the STA Submission – 2026 NRI Roadmap Exposure Draft

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