

## **Collaborating to a purpose - for game-changing outcomes** *Hard lessons from 20 years of the Cooperative Research Centres Program in Australia*

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The Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program, introduced in 1990, is an iconic program in the Australian research system that has been copied in other countries. The CRC Program was designed primarily to encourage collaboration in research and development between the private sector and public sector research bodies but also to address research concentration for world-class teams and preparing PhD graduates for non-academic careers.

The CRC Program has been formally reviewed approximately every four years with the most recent review, chaired by the speaker, taking place within the context of the Review of the National Innovation System in 2008. A copy of the CRC Program Review, which is the prime focus of this talk, can be found at [www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Documents/CRC\\_Review\\_Report.htm](http://www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Documents/CRC_Review_Report.htm)

At the time of the Review there had been 10 selection rounds resulting in 168 CRCs over the life of the CRC Program (102 if renewals and new-from-existing are not counted separately). The total investment by the Australian Government was of the order of AUD3 billion, with almost AUD9 billion (in kind and in cash – tied and untied) leveraged from participants - including approximately AUD2.9 billion from universities; AUD2.3 billion from industry; AUD1.6 billion from government end-users; and AUD1.1 billion (mostly in kind) from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

The Review found that many CRCs had produced important outcomes and the existence of such a high-profile program had changed the way Australians approach large-scale research cooperation focused on the needs of end-users. But the evolution in the and structural and governance requirements, objectives, and selection criteria of the CRC Program, along with changes in the external environment, had led to dissatisfaction with significant aspects of the Program, and had restricted its potential in important sections of the Australian economy, which in turn means that its role as a driver of innovation in Australia was not as effective as it could be. Following the Review, significant changes have been made to the CRC Program including the central requirement that each new CRC should address a clear major research challenge and not exist solely for collaboration’s sake in a particular field.

Two other Australian public-private sector research collaboration programs – the Australian Research Council Centres of Excellence Program and the Australian Research Council Linkage Grants - are approximately the same age the CRC Program and in many ways have been more effective in terms of research outcomes for end-users. These two programs will be compared to the CRC Program to illustrate the core success factors for effective multi-partner, multi-sector research centres.