

## PROFILE AND ADVOCACY

### DISCOVERIES NEED DOLLARS – PROPOSED NHMRC BUDGET CUTS THREATEN THE FUTURE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Severe cuts to the NHMRC budget, in the order of \$400 million over three years, were understood to be proposed in the forthcoming Federal budget. Far from cuts, the Bio21 Cluster advocates an increase in funding of biomedical research towards future health and economic benefits. A grass roots campaign to protect medical research funding appears to be having effects at the highest levels. It was fantastic to see thousands turn out to the Melbourne rally at the State Library on 12 April. All interested parties are encouraged to lend their voice to the campaign and keep the message alive until budget day: [www.discoveriesneeddollars.org](http://www.discoveriesneeddollars.org).

The Chair of the Bio21 Cluster, Professor Ian Gust, AO, wrote this open letter to the Prime Minister on behalf of members and the sector:

*Dear Prime Minister,*

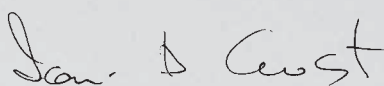
*The rumoured \$400m cut to the budget of the NHMRC, the nation's premier funder of medical research, together with cuts to the budget of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and the failure of the Government to adequately engage with its Chief Scientists Office during the climate change debate are deeply troubling.*

*As the ALP science policy states so eloquently... "Science is important not just to our material wellbeing but to every aspect of our lives - to our environment, to our health, to our understanding of ourselves and our place in the universe. Science will make us go on enjoying all the benefits of human ingenuity and modern industry, while conserving our resources and protecting our fragile planet. It is absolutely critical to Australia's future".*

*The effect of major cuts to R&D spending will be to reduce the number of opportunities available to young scientists who are often in the most innovative and productive phase of their career and to halt the momentum of many large programs, reducing their international competitiveness.*

*At a time when many countries in the region are increasing their spending on education and research, Australia, if it is to be both smart and lucky, needs our unwavering commitment to invest in science and innovation.*

*Yours sincerely,*



**Professor Ian Gust** AO Chairman



DISCOVERIES NEED DOLLARS Rally held in Melbourne on April 12, 2011

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**HOT  
TOPIC**

## PROFILE AND ADVOCACY continued



Jerry Adams

### RESEARCHERS IN MEMBER ORGANISATIONS WIN MAJOR NHMRC AWARDS

Against the background of proposed cuts to funding, we celebrate the recent achievements of outstanding individuals among our member organisations – further proof, if any were needed, of the value of greater investment in our local vibrant biomedical research sector.

Researchers from Member organisations in the Bio21 Cluster have attracted five of the nine NHMRC Program Grants awarded this year, with funding to commence in 2012.

The largest grants went to Professors Jerry Adams and Nic Nicola of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, for major research programs on cancer mechanisms and blood cell regulation, respectively. Professors James McCluskey (a former Director of the Bio21 Cluster) and Mark Smyth from the University of Melbourne will each lead programs researching the immune system. Professor Geoffrey Donnan, Director of the Florey Neuroscience Institutes and a member of the Cluster's Scientific Advisory Council, will lead a Program that will research the outcomes of stroke and include clinical trials.

In addition, we congratulate Professor Ashley Bush, Mental Health Research Institute and University of Melbourne and Professor Jane Visvader, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, on becoming Australia Fellows in 2011. Professor Visvader has participated in the Cluster's Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program. The Fellowships provide significant funding over 5 years for their research into Alzheimer's Disease and breast cancer, respectively.

More information about the researchers, their work and the awards can be found at <http://www.wehi.edu.au> and <http://newsroom.melbourne.edu/news/n-480>



Nicos Nicola



James McCluskey



Mark Smyth



Geoffrey Donnan



Ashley Bush



Jane Visvader

## WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING SUMMIT (WiSE), Canberra

The Bio21 Cluster was pleased to sponsor the recent WiSE summit held at Parliament House, Canberra on 11 April, organised by UN Women, National Committee Australia and managed by the Federation of Australian Scientific Societies (FASTS). The goals of the summit align with the Bio21 Cluster's keen interest in helping improve conditions for women in biomedical research to safeguard the workforce for the future. The summit brought together leaders from a wide variety of scientific and engineering fields, representing both industry and academia, to find solutions to the specific difficulties faced by women to remain competitive in the sector and further to improve women's participation rates at all levels. Cuts to programs that support science education in schools were highlighted as a major threat to building girls' and young women's participation in mathematics and sciences.

The need for systems that support women's confidence and networking, such as mentoring, were highlighted as critical for women establishing their scientific and engineering careers. Outcomes of the roundtable sessions will be presented to the Federal Government in a communiqué of specific achievable measures and are available on the FASTS website: [www.fasts.org](http://www.fasts.org)



Panel discussion at WiSE. (L-R) Dr Stella Clark, Prof Bryan Gaensler, Prof Caroline Crosthwaite and Dr Renate Egan.

## RECENT GOVERNMENT SUBMISSIONS

The Bio21 Cluster engages regularly at political and government levels to advocate on behalf of its Members. Already this year there have been 3 opportunities to contribute to government discussion papers.

**Advanced Health Research Centres (AHRC).** The NHMRC proposes the development of AHRCs to integrate research more closely with health service delivery. The aim is for patients to benefit sooner from health and medical research activities. In responding to the discussion paper, the Bio21 Cluster noted that the Cluster itself is one model for collaborative research, education and health care that could extend to focus more on translational outcomes. We advocated strongly that additional funding should follow designation as an AHC for there to be any real value.

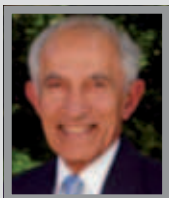
### Strategic Framework for Research Infrastructure Investment

Overall, the Cluster commended the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research on their recognition in the discussion paper of the value of investment in research infrastructure (technology platforms, services, etc.) to the research community as a whole and their acknowledgement that support is required to sustain such infrastructure in the medium to long term. In its response, the Bio21 Cluster provided a model for prioritisation of needs, cyclic review and evaluation of capabilities and investments. The Cluster has been pivotal in establishing the Victorian Platform Technologies Network (VPTN) and advocated that existing local infrastructure networks be recognised in the national scheme, as they contribute significant expertise and resources of value at a national level.

### Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC)

The Department of Health and Ageing proposes changes to MSAC processes for applications for public funding. MSAC provides advice to the Australian Government on the safety, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of new medical technologies, devices and procedures. The aim of the changes is to improve consistency of assessment, transparency of review processes and improved efficiency. While the proposed changes would achieve these outcomes, the Bio21 Cluster suggested that changes should go further to facilitate communication with recognised health professionals. In addition, an expected increase in linked drug and technology applications, e.g. with new tests needed to decide which patients receive certain therapies, may necessitate a coordinated process with the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC).

### WELCOME



David de Kretser

It is with great pleasure we welcome to the Board of the Bio21 Cluster Professor David de Kretser AC (MD 1969, HonLLD 2006), former Governor of Victoria, and Dr George Morstyn, MB, BS, PhD, FRACP. Each is appointed for a term of three years.

A few highlights of their distinguished careers follow:

#### Professor David de Kretser AC

- 28th Governor of Victoria April 2006 - 2011
- Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the Australian Academy of Science and the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering
- Officer of the Order of Australia in 2001 and a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2006
- Awarded the Centenary Medal in 2003

Professor de Kretser was the founding director of the Monash Institute of Reproduction and Development, now known as the Monash Institute of Medical Research, serving from 1991 to 2005. He was a professor of anatomy in Monash University's Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences from 1978 to 2005 and the Faculty's associate dean for biotechnology development from 2002 to 2006. In 2000, Professor de Kretser founded Andrology Australia, a successful educational program in male reproductive health. In 2003, he was named a Sir John Monash Distinguished Professor.



George Morstyn

**Dr George Morstyn** joined Amgen in 1987 as an advisor, later becoming VP of Medical and Clinical Affairs, then Chief Medical Officer and in 1999 Senior Vice President of Development. He is on the Boards of GBS Bioventures (Chair), Chemgenex, Proacta (based in Auckland and San Diego developing cancer therapy), Nuprotect and Symbio (Japan - based companies developing drugs for cancer treatment) and the not-for-profit Therapeutic Innovation Australia. He is currently Deputy Director and Director of Research for the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre.

The Bio21 Cluster is also delighted to welcome:

**Dr Nathalie Braussaud**, Manager, Neuro Research Services at Florey Neuroscience Institutes, to the Business Development Managers group. Nathalie's background is in science with industry experience in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sector.

**Dr Roland Scollay**, independent consultant in biotech and drug development, to the Scientific Advisory Council

### FAREWELL

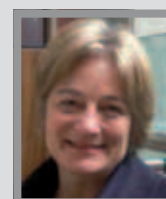
We farewell **Professor James McCluskey**, incoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), who retired from the Bio21 Cluster Board in April, and thank him for his valuable contributions.

A farewell function for **Dr Marianne Hibbert**, who was the Project Director, BioGrid Australia for 7 years, was held at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Her dedication and hard work was celebrated by her friends and colleagues who wished her well for her future challenges.

A farewell luncheon was held for **Rob Merriel**, Director Business Development, Melbourne Health, on 6 April. Rob was an active member of the Bio21 Cluster Business Development Managers group and we thank him for his involvement and wish him well in his new employment.



James McCluskey



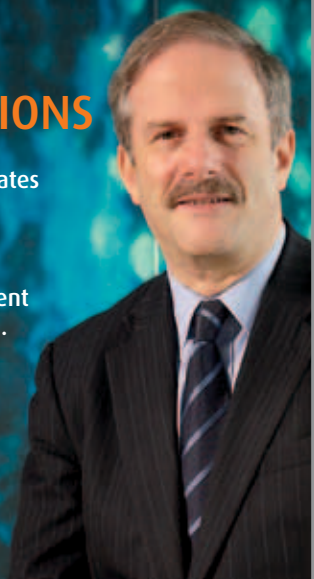
Marianne Hibbert



Rob Merriel

## CONGRATULATIONS

The Bio21 Cluster congratulates Professor David Copolov, Director on the Board of the Bio21 Cluster, who was awarded an OAM in the recent 2011 Australia Day Honours.



## COLLABORATIVE RESOURCES AND PLATFORM TECHNOLOGIES

### Collaboration with the Victorian e-Research Strategic Initiative (VeRSI)

VeRSI have received extension funding until June 2012 to undertake projects beyond the boundaries of their original partner organisations (VeRSI 2 Extension Program). VeRSI have approached the Bio21 Cluster and four projects have been put forward from the Bio21 Cluster for collaborative development. These are:

- > **A facilities management system for the VPTN:** to enable facility booking across organisations and thereby streamline and improve efficiency of the VPTN
- > **Bioresource management across animal facilities:** database coordination for sharing mouse strain information, was originally part of the Bioresources STI-funded project. Although the Australian Phenomics Network service has been created, linkage and connectivity is still an issue. This project will be coordinated via the Bioresources Oversight Committee.
- > **UROP:** database and extended functionality of UROP communications network to ensure better tracking of alumni and better management of the application process including looking at enhanced capabilities such as an on-line resume builder for UROP alumni.
- > **Data storage capability:** capacity for longer term information storage for Bio21 Cluster Member organisations.



<https://www.versi.edu.au/>

### VPTN – Update

The VPTN (quietly) celebrated its 21st month in April. Over this period the VPTN has grown, collected and maintained extensive information on a very diverse range of capabilities and has held 12 workshops in our professional development series.

The VPTN held its first workshop for the year on April 7. An extension of the Marketing introduction held last year, this was focussed on using the web and a range of social media tools to help with marketing, communications and business development. It provided some clarity as to how and why you may choose to walk the social media path and discussed issues to be aware of, and also some practical tips on exactly what to do (for the technically challenged of us out there). It was attended by 40 people, including facility managers and a range of institutional communications managers and was a fantastic success.

The upcoming workshops in the professional development series will focus on the views from the biotech sector as to the barriers to accessing core facilities and platform technologies and on the legal obligations of a fee for service facility. More soon on our website ([www.platformtechnologies.org](http://www.platformtechnologies.org)), and in other announcements.

There are now 108 facilities in the VPTN, in more than 30 institutions across two nodes! Collecting the information and placing it in a context so researchers can find it is a very substantial challenge on a number of fronts. Remembering that the VPTN is only as good as the information resource we maintain, we are extremely grateful to everyone who supports the network through providing this information. We continue to develop processes to make this easier for everyone and encourage all feedback that may improve this for you.

With the VPTN and through the Victorian Bioportal, the research community has a resource that really is equal to the best in the world in creating an environment for identifying resources required for your research. As the VPTN looks forward to the next year of its activity and beyond, it will be focussed on refining and implementing its plans to extend the network and to provide a new range of tools for improved management of a facility and improved and streamlined tools for researchers wishing to access them. It will set a benchmark for core facilities networks. More to come very soon, or if you would like to know more before then, contact Gerard Gibbs at the Cluster.



<http://www.platformtechnologies.org/>

## CAPABILITY-BUILDING VIA EDUCATION & TRAINING

### UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM (UROP)

#### Welcome Forum

The UROP Welcome Forum was again generously hosted by our Principal Program Sponsor CSL Ltd on the evening of Thursday February 24. Close to 50 current and former UROP students and some of their supervisors heard Dr Chris Tonkin, Victoria's Young Tall Poppy for 2010, present passionately on his work in malaria and his career path. This was followed by a panel discussion on research careers pathways, with two CSL research scientists, Drs Mae Wong and Brent McKenzie, joining Chris Tonkin.



Some new 2011 UROP students with Dr Tam Nguyen (L) and Dr Andrew Nash(R)

#### Kyle Slater wins IET Present Around the World competition

The Bio21 Cluster congratulates Kyle Slater, a former UROP student, now PhD student at the Bionic Ear Institute, on winning the global final of the Present Around the World competition in London on November 25, 2010. In the competition, run by the Institution of Engineering and Technology, heats are held around the world where students and young engineering professionals give verbal presentations of a project they have developed. More information is available at the Bionic Ear Institute website: [www.bionicear.org/news.html](http://www.bionicear.org/news.html).



Kyle Slater (R) receiving his award in London.

#### Patron of UROP

With the conclusion of his term as Governor of Victoria, we farewell Professor David de Kretser, AC, as Patron of UROP and thank him warmly for his service to the Program. However, we look forward to keeping him apprised of developments in UROP as he joins the Board of the Bio21 Cluster.

As his replacement, we are delighted to announce that Australian of the Year, Mr Simon McKeon has agreed to be the new Patron of UROP. Mr McKeon's business experience and dedication to important community issues will be invaluable and we look forward to his association with the Program. He has some early history with the Bio21 Cluster as a Director (2001-2002) during its start-up phase.



Simon McKeon



## FORUMS FOR DEVELOPING IDEAS AND COLLABORATIONS

The Bio21 Cluster will be organising a number of forums and workshops during 2011, a brief calendar of events follows and information will be available on [www.bio21.com.au/events](http://www.bio21.com.au/events) and updated as details are confirmed.

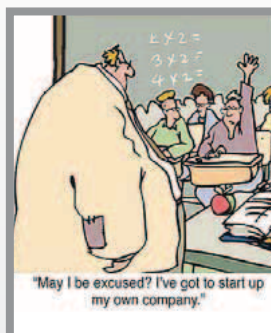
## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### MBA IN A DAY

Presented by  
BioMentoring Australia

**June 17 2011**

A repeat of the successful program held in 2010. This one day workshop provides non-business professionals with an intensive introduction to the key concepts, the language and the business principles underpinning management and the commercialisation of science.



### NoLIMITS

In association with The Nossal  
Institute for Global Health

**July 21 2011**

A second workshop bringing together engineers and clinicians to brainstorm novel solutions to health and medical problems.



### NANO MEDICINE

A Bio21 Cluster Symposium

**October 4 2011**

An opportunity to hear about the latest in this fascinating new branch of medicine including topics such as nanomaterials and drug delivery, nano approaches to monitoring and diagnostics and nano structures and scaffolds in Medicine.



### TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The Melbourne Summit  
under the auspices of the  
Bio21 Cluster Hospital Research  
Directors Forum

**October 9-12 2011**

Translational Research is the catchphrase of the moment but what does it really mean and how can we best ensure that basic research findings are "translated" into better treatments for patients and improved health for the whole community. Keynote speaker: Professor Dame Sally Davies, the Director General of Research & Development and Chief Scientific Adviser for the Department of Health and NHS, UK.

