

# **Fund Australia's needs, not just students' choices: Chief Scientist**

**Professor Ian Chubb to address what Australia needs, along with discussion on what students and industry want**

On 17 May, Australia's Chief Scientist Professor Ian Chubb will provide a glimpse into the health of Australian science.

He is the key speaker in a plenary session on 'Enhancing returns: what Australia wants, what students want and what industry want' at the annual conference of the Cooperative Research Centre of Australia (CRCA) in Adelaide.

Professor Chubb's insight into what Australian science needs will be well informed. One week after the CRCA conference, he will present the full findings of a national review into the 'health of Australian science' at the National Press Club (23 May).

"I will focus my speech at the CRCA conference on agriculture and engineering, as they highlight key areas of concern for Australia's future prosperity," Professor Chubb says.

The Chief Scientist's *Health of Australian Science Report*, which drew on national and international data and statistics as well as results from three commissioned reports, will detail Australia's strengths and weaknesses in particular areas.

Key questions that Professor Chubb's research probed include: whether Australia is vulnerable, on an international scale, in terms of its breadth and quality of science; what disciplines are vulnerable due to training, workforce and funding issues; and how various disciplines compare internationally.

Other recent international reports already highlight that Australia's strengths lie in its research outputs, but its vulnerabilities lie mainly in the educational foundations and funding structures.

"There are also concerns with STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] student enrolments in high school and universities, gender inequalities and the age profile of academic workforce," says Professor Chubb.

Since his own early education through to preparing the *Health of Australian Science Report*, Professor Chubb has observed that funding follows student choices, not necessarily what is required for the benefit of Australia.

"Our funding systems should consider the needs of our nation, not just follow the choices made by students who don't necessarily, and rightly so, have the national interest at the forefront of their minds when choosing their study options," Professor Chubb says.

Speaking in the plenary about what students want will be Professor Peter Høj, Vice Chancellor and President of the University of South Australia and soon to be Vice Chancellor of the University of

Queensland.

“We need many more of them to want to work in industry,” says Professor Høj, on how students can increase future returns for Australia.

“For industry to turn more innovative and for industry to take advantage of the basic research conducted in our organisations, it is imperative that more of our PhD graduates find jobs in industry and broader business.”

Professor Høj says there are two fundamental levels that Australian science needs addressed: “First, school leavers need to be much more proficient in the basic sciences. Second, we need to augment research funding and have incentive schemes that encourage the flow of ideas from universities to business.”

He says the biggest area for vulnerability in Australia is “the lack of a true and deep innovation drive in industry”.

“Australia wants long-term innovation to underpin long-term financial sustainability—industry does often not take that long-term view,” says Professor Høj.

Kate Carnell AO, Chief Executive Officer of beyondblue and former Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Food and Grocery Council, will speak about what industry wants when it comes to increasing returns from Australian science.

More information about the CRCA Conference can be found here: [www.crca.asn.au/conference](http://www.crca.asn.au/conference)

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**For interview and/or photos:**

**Professor Ian Chubb**, Chief Scientist, Office of the Chief Scientist, Australia

**Phone:** +61 2 6276 1727, **Email:** [chief.scientist@chiefscientist.gov.au](mailto:chief.scientist@chiefscientist.gov.au)

**Professor Peter Høj**, Vice Chancellor and President, University of South Australia

**Phone:** +61 8 8302 0502, **Email:** [Peter.Hoj@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Peter.Hoj@unisa.edu.au)

**For media assistance:**

**Alison Binney**, Econnect Communication, Brisbane, Australia

**Mobile:** +61 (0)428 900 450, **Email:** [alison@econnect.com.au](mailto:alison@econnect.com.au)