

Construction industry rallies behind Construction Innovation

By Dr Keith Hampson
Chief Executive Officer
CRC for *Construction Innovation*

Earlier this year the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for *Construction Innovation* applied for renewal funding from the Federal Government under the CRC Programme.

Our ongoing research is funded through to June 2008 and the application for renewal funding was intended to continue that research until 2014.

A few weeks ago, we heard our application had been rejected.

After getting over the shock of this setback, I was very heartened to learn of the genuine dismay this decision has evoked from within the entire property, design, construction and facility management sector.

A national research centre that focuses on the sector and is jointly funded by industry and the Federal Government is seen as vital to everybody in the industry.

Neil Marshall, President of the Australian Construction Industry Forum (ACIF), has written to the Minister for Industry, The Hon. Ian Macfarlane, and has encouraged all of the ACIF partners to do the same.

Most have already done this or personally spoken to relevant MPs, including the Australian Institute of Builders (AIB), Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors, Association of Consulting Engineers Australia, Master Builders Association of Australia, Property Council of Australia, Royal Australian Institute of Architects and the Facility Management Association of Australia.

The ACIF Board is currently working on a vision that maps out a 10 point plan for the future of the industry. One of those points is centred on the absolute need for the type of applied research that *Construction Innovation* has pioneered. For that reason ACIF was a partner in our CRC renewal bid.

Along with ACIF, 24 other private and public-sector industry and research organisations joined *Construction Innovation* in its CRC renewal bid - an unprecedented show of support for our work. Many of these organisations have also strenuously urged the Federal Government not to walk away from our industry.

Recently, we commissioned STEM Partnership (specialists in technology evaluation and planning) to evaluate our future research and commercialisation programs. STEM's verdict is that our programs could improve industry productivity by \$1.2 billion and GDP by \$6.5 billion. Compelling figures indeed.

These were the messages that John McCarthy, our chair, and I took to Canberra on Wednesday, 31 May when we met with the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, Ian Macfarlane. Also at this meeting was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister, Bob Baldwin, who is a registered builder himself and understands the industry very well.

The meeting was very productive. The Minister said he was aware of our excellent reputation across the entire industry and the good work we've been doing over the last five years. He listened sympathetically to our urgings for a national research centre to be established and has his departmental officials investigating the opportunities for funding. We continue to work with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources on this.

There are precedents for what we are asking. In 2005, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, stepped in to create the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility to continue the work of the CRC for the Great Barrier Reef and the CRC for Tropical Rainforest Ecology.

In the meantime, all of us are continuing to lobby other appropriate members of federal and state government to support our proposal.

I hope I will be able to deliver good news on this matter soon.

Keith

* * *

The CRC for *Construction Innovation* brings together 21 industry, government and research partners in a collaboration to find innovative solutions to improve the economic, environmental and social benefit of the design, property, construction and facility management sectors as well as the Australian community. Website: <http://www.constructioninnovation.info>