

# AIB GM'S REPORT

Troy R Williams  
General Manager  
The Australian Institute of Buiding



The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Construction Innovation is a consortium of companies, government agencies and universities that collaborate on a range of research projects reviewing building design, construction techniques and facilities management post-construction. The CRC for Construction Innovation is established under an Australian Government program designed to increase Australia's economic competitiveness by commercialising research. Recently the CRC for Construction Innovation was advised that its funding bid for a further period was not successful, so it's appropriate to consider the future of research into building practice in Australia

The building profession has been well served by the CRC for Construction Innovation and its three research streams, these being: business and industry development; sustainable built assess; and delivery and management of built assets. Indeed, two CRC for Construction Innovation projects are finalists in this year's AIB Professional Excellence In Building Awards, with the winners to be announced at the Construct 2006 conference.

Despite twenty five industry stakeholders committing AUD\$16million (in addition to Australian Government funding) the CRC for Construction Innovation was advised by the Minister for Education, Science & Training, the Hon. Julie Bishop MP, that this funding bid was not successful. The funding sought was around AUD\$25million over seven years.

The Australian Institute of Building (AIB) was amongst the first and most active stakeholders within in the construction industry to lobby government to secure, through the CRC for Construction Innovation, continued support by the Australian Government for building research. Over the course of a month I met with more than thirty Ministers and other members of the Commonwealth Parliament to reinforce the important role that the CRC for Construction Innovation was playing. There was broad support for the CRC's work with many MPs actively calling for the Minister to review the Department's decision.

Given AIB's efforts it was most pleasing when the Minister offered to extend the CRC for Construction Innovation's term, thereby allowing the organisation to make another application in the 2008 CRC funding round.

An alternate path to ensure that construction research continues in Australia is for the establishment of a 'construction centre of excellence' which would receive its funding from other government sources and also from industry stakeholders. This is a medium-term approach as the funding mechanisms are complex, however the CRC for Construction Innovation is actively progressing this as the preferred option.

Irrespective of whether the CRC for Construction Innovation continues in its current form, or is restructured into a 'centre of excellence' it is likely that the arrangements for industry-driven research for Australia's construction industry are likely to change, and for the better.

AIB believes that the CRC for Construction Innovation, or its successor, can strengthen its contribution to the building profession with a strong focus on industry-driven projects rather than pure research. Industry-driven research is, of course, complemented by pure research undertaken by universities. AIB will also be seeking enhanced, meaningful and regular consultation with major industry stakeholders. This will facilitate industry-driven research that provides tools readily adopted by building professionals. AIB's position is consistent with that of the Australian Construction Industry Forum (ACIF) which considered the matter at its most recent Board meeting.

The building profession has derived benefit from the CRC for Construction Innovation's research projects. An independent evaluation concluded that its research will deliver approximately AUD\$5billion towards Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the next twenty five years. Based on this record of achievement there is widespread acceptance that there is a need for a vehicle to support industry-driven research. The failure of the CRC to secure funding in the current round provides a unique opportunity to re-evaluate priorities to provide an increased dividend for the building profession. \\\

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