

**Record of Australian eResearch Infrastructure Council (AeRIC) Meeting  
Monday 17 November 2008  
Industry House, Canberra**

**Attendees**

**AeRIC**

Professor Tom Cochrane (Chair)  
Dr Rhys Francis  
Mr Alan McMeekin  
Professor Robin Stanton  
Dr Robert Woodcock  
Professor Iain Wallace  
Mr Chris Hancock

**DIISR**

Ms Clare McLaughlin  
Ms Cheryl Kut  
Mr Peter Nicholson

**Apologies**

Ms Anne-Marie Lansdown  
Ms Cathrine Harboe-Ree

**Item 1 – Welcome**

The Chair (Professor Cochrane) welcomed members to the meeting and noted two apologies from Ms Lansdown and Ms Harboe-Ree.

**Item 2 – Actions Arising from October meeting**

The Council agreed that the minutes of the October meeting were an accurate record.

Professor Cochrane noted that all actions had been undertaken.

In response to a question from the Chair, Dr Francis suggested that the record of the feedback from the eResearch Forum at eResearch Australasia attached to the October minutes could be modified for wider distribution, including expanding on and clarifying the issues raised.

**Action:**

- Dr Francis to arrange a more formal version of the record of feedback in conjunction with the Department for distribution to eResearch conference participants and / or on the PFC website.

**Item 3 – Department of Innovation update on latest developments**

Ms McLaughlin provided an update from the Department's perspective on latest developments, in Ms Lansdown's absence. Ms McLaughlin noted the impact of the Global Financial Crisis on the Government's timeframes, with the Prime Minister's announcement that a package of infrastructure items would be announced before Christmas. It was noted that this process had included the shortening of timeframes for decision on Round 1 Higher Education Endowment Fund (HEEF) applications, with interviews for the 14 short-listed candidates underway and recommendations expected to be made to the Ministers by the HEEF Advisory Board by the end of November.

In response to members, Ms McLaughlin indicated that in consequence of government decisions being brought forward, it was likely that expenditure on education and research infrastructure would also be expected to occur early. She noted that a White Paper response to the Report of the Review of the National Innovation System was still expected before Christmas. However, it was noted that the current environment was fairly fluid.

#### **Item 4 – Executive Director’s Report**

Dr Francis provided the Council with an update on Pfc activities.

The first regular meeting of the Pfc directors with DIISR was convened towards the end of the NCRIS Capabilities’ meeting on 13-14 November in Canberra. Outcomes from the meeting with the Pfc Directors were: agreement to meet every quarter; agreement to articulate the key messages to be communicated from each component; and agreement to select one or two domain (capability-specific) conferences in 2009 at which to offer a Pfc workshop.

Further feedback on the Capabilities’ meeting was provided to the Council, including indications that goodwill and momentum generated from the two days would be useful in progressing capabilities, particularly Pfc.

#### *ICI / ARCS*

Professor Tony Williams' presentation on ARCS at the NCRIS Capabilities’ meeting attracted the most discussion of all the Pfc components.

Intersect has now replaced aC3 as the NSW member of ARCS. Dr Francis had recently attended the first full meeting of the ARCS Executive Committee and considered in consequence that much would happen over the next year in ARCS. There was, however, still a reasonable level of effort on establishment and management and the full range of real activity would probably not take place till 2009.

The new appointments to the management of ARCS, noting the application process had indicated much interest in these types of national roles.

#### *ANDS*

There has been excellent progress in ANDS over the last few months. The funding agreement and the collaboration agreement for ANDS have now been executed. Dr Ross Wilkinson has been appointed as Executive Director of ANDS. An independent chair of the steering committee was likely to be announced shortly and is expected to be Dr Ron Sandland, former Deputy Chief Executive of CSIRO. Three independent members, Mr Paul Sherlock (University of South Australia), Professor Mark Ragan (Institute of Molecular Bioscience, University of Queensland) and Dr Lee Taylor (Centre for Health Record Linkage, NSW; NSW Department of Health) have agreed to join the committee. The first meeting of the committee will be convened on the 17 December.

#### *NCI*

Unsolicited positive feedback on the contribution of the Executive Director of NCI, Professor Lindsay Botten, has been received. Progress included increased CSIRO investment in the national facility and specialised services; development of the computational tools and techniques (CT&T) activity; and expectation of funding from a few universities, with indications that this trend would grow over time.

There were some issues raised in the NCI Progress Report submitted to DIISR for discussion at this meeting and overall the report was excellent.

## *AAF*

Detailed discussion of the AAF was listed later in the agenda. A primary issue was that the business owners and beneficiaries of the AAF were not integrated into decision making around its design and establishment. Another issue was that the shibboleth test federation was formed under the Meta-Access Management System (MAMS) Project and its governance is not closely connected to the AAF project. In addition, the cost of setting up the federation, as envisaged by the project steering committee, could be as high as \$2 million.

### **Action:**

- DIISR to circulate to the Council the slides from the PfC Directors' presentations at the NCRIS Capabilities' meeting.

## **Item 5 – NeAT**

Most Round 1 NeAT projects are underway, although not all project plans are yet finalised.

In the Round 2 open call for ideas for future NeAT projects, 68 submissions were received, including many good ideas. Overall positive feedback has been received on the open call for ideas.

With a budget of approximately \$5 million for Round 2 projects, and in view of the number of submissions, the process of selecting the projects to be developed will take longer. The short-listing process will consider key issues such as the rationale for NeAT investment in an idea. It was unlikely that any announcements would be made before Christmas.

The Council discussed targets for the Round 2 funding and any further avenues for good ideas to be considered. Members also discussed the selection processes, including avoiding cost shifting and the degree of emphasis on contribution to research support.

The Council noted that the number of applications indicated the unmet demand for these types of projects, and there was agreement that these would ideally be considered again should further funding become available.

## **Item 6 – Discussion arising from progress reports**

### *ICI / ARCS*

DIISR requested the Council's views on the ICI and NCI progress reports.

Both the ARCS Executive Director, Professor Williams, and Dr Francis had now both been invited to speak at the next CAUDIT Executive meeting on the relationships between ARCS service providers and university IT Departments.

It was suggested that the ICI Progress Report did not accurately reflect the time lag in reaching production level services. However these matters of specific concern haven been raised directly with Professor Williams. Members discussed the key issue of quality of service and the need to strengthen the key performance indicator (KPI)

process. Members noted that production quality measures, and the concept of service governance, were missing among the recently agreed KPIs.

Members agreed that the ICI Progress Report could be accepted, and proposed that the Department write to Professor Williams seeking the strengthening of the Service Provision KPI for the next Business Plan and Progress Report and specifically to include a measure of the reliability and production-ready quality of services.

#### Communications and Promotional Activities under ICI

The ICI Progress Report on communication activities was approved and it was agreed that communication was always a relative challenge. Members noted that until the Council established an overall communications plan, it was difficult for the components to fully undertake communication activities. Members further noted that there had been a distinct improvement in the clarity of the ARCS messages between the time of the eResearch Forum in September and the NCRIS Capabilities' meeting in November.

The Council agreed that DIISR communicate to ARCS that there were key communication challenges that remain to be met and that this should happen in the context of overall PFC communication activities.

#### **Action:**

- DIISR to write to Professor Williams on the matter of strengthening the Service Provision KPI and noting that there are key communication challenges to be met.

#### *NCI*

The NCI Progress Report raised a number of issues in addition to reporting progress against the Business Plan. NCI have agreed to provide an updated business plan to DIISR, hence the depth of the progress report.

With respect to the data storage issue, Dr Francis noted that NCI was not funded specifically to provide long-term retention of data – but could be expected to host data retention during a project. NCI's future suggestions on this issue would be useful.

With respect to the Australian High-End Computing Council (AHECC) proposal, Professor Stanton referred to the encouragement from Dr Mike Sargent to have NCI operate with a steering committee that handled a broader element of HPC planning. This would result in the stakeholder committee (such as the present NCI Steering Committee) operating at a level subordinate to the broader committee.

Members discussed the proposal for an AHECC. It was noted that a point may be reached where specialised facilities were of equivalent stature to the national facility, particularly where funded by other bodies than NCRIS. It was also noted that the development of other landmark facilities would also raise governance issues that would need addressing. The Government's decision on an AHECC is not a matter of urgency at this stage.

Decisions around the proposed AHECC depend on the next steps for Government with respect to EIF and the Government's response to the Review of the National Innovation System. The Council agreed that the matter be deferred for consideration

to a later date, and agreed that extending the current arrangements for the NCI Steering Committee was appropriate.

**Action:**

- That DIISR agree to extend the NCI Steering Committee arrangements, in the context of deferring discussion of the AHECC.
- That DIISR seek NCI's future advice on long-term retention of data.

**Item 7 – Progress of AAF**

The key issue with the implementation of the AAF resides in who the decision-makers are. Higher Education Services (HES) was not motivated to absorb the risk entailed in establishing the federation. Added to these issues was the difficulty apparent in the project team resolving some issues; that the test federation was not governed by the AAF; and that there were significant differences between the needs and ambitions of the PKI and Shibboleth components. In addition, Dr Francis noted that there was a lack of clarity over the planned source of future revenue to support an operating AAF.

Members discussed alternative options and examples, including the Swiss Switch project and the UK Federation. It was noted that the AAF need not necessarily provide PKI as a service and that other entities could take this on. Options included allowing potential users to be involved in the governance of the Shibboleth test federation.

It was noted that more communication to stakeholders on the status of the AAF was needed, and particularly with Universities Australia.

The Council endorsed the 'next steps' outlined in the AAF paper presented to the meeting. Members also felt it would be helpful to engage a person to work through the governance and legal issues necessary to implement the AAF and recommend options to address them.

**Action:**

- Dr Francis and DIISR to progress the next steps outlined in the AAF paper in light of the Council's comments.

**Item 8 – Communication Strategy**

The two-day Capabilities meeting highlighted a need for greater alignment in communication activities between the PfC components.

It was suggested that there should be encouragement to engage with PfC objectives; specifically mentioning research institutions and universities themselves as beneficiaries. It was noted that learned academies were already in the draft as a key audience, and noted that universities should be added specifically.

Members commented on the key messages in the draft Communication Strategy. It was noted that the third key message should include data sharing specifically, and that it was useful that advanced modelling was included rather than just high performance computing.

In relation to channels of communication, members noted that this should occur through the various PfC components. Members noted possible performance indicators

for communication – increased revenue, increased recognition at international and national levels – as well as enablers of good communication including training for people undertaking communication activities. Members agreed that coherence across the methods of branding in Pfc would be good but noted that the Government’s chief concern was the recognition of NCRIS, not the divergence in branding. It was also considered that while services may not all be contained in a single package called Pfc, there was value in conveying a coherent and clearly bundled message about Pfc from all components of Pfc. This should be in addition to the customised advice each individual component might provide to its specific audience of users.

**Action:**

- Dr Francis to further progress the draft Communication Strategy, noting the views of the Council at this meeting.

**Item 9 – Other business and Next meeting**

The Chair invited members to raise any other business. No other business was raised.

The Chair noted that this was the Council’s last meeting for 2008 and that it would meet again at a time to be advised.