

AUSTRALIAN E-RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE COUNCIL (AeRIC)

AeRIC MEETING – 29 May 2008

AGENDA ITEM 3: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Purpose

To update AeRIC on a number of developments within the Platforms for Collaboration Capability and matters not covered elsewhere in this agenda.

Issues

National Computational Infrastructure (NCI)

It is anticipated that Professor Lindsay Botten will be appointed as the NCI Director in May 2008 and will be based at the ANU.

In early April, the ANU and the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) called a tender for a joint BoM-ANU acquisition of two supercomputers to address a potential gap in high performance scientific computing capacity supporting climate and earth systems research. The ANU system is expected to provide high performance computing services to the climate modelling community as well as other Australian research communities using such facilities.

ANU submitted the NCI Annual Business Plan on 31 March 2008 noting that it would revise the Plan and submit the revision to DIISR when:

- the joint tender request with BoM has resulted in greater technical and timing certainty; and
- the incoming NCI Director has had the opportunity to develop and expand on certain areas of the Plan that are currently under-developed.

Interoperation and Collaboration Infrastructure (ICI/ARCS)

A number of new contractual arrangements are anticipated to enable additional activities to be carried out by the Australian Research Collaboration Service (ARCS):

- A variation to the ICI NCRIS Agreement was agreed to by ARCS in April 2008, to bring forward \$2.1m in ICI for 2007/08, from 2008/09, upon acceptance of the ABP.
- A second variation to the ICI Agreement is being drafted to provide \$0.5m to ARCS for collaboration services, expected to be paid prior to the end of June this year.
- A new NCRIS contract for authorisation services delivered over the next three years between DIISR and ARCS for \$2m is expected to be agreed this financial year.

Both the Queensland Cyber Infrastructure Foundation (QCIF) and the NSW Institute for Trans-disciplinary eResearch Services and Technology (INTERSECT) are expected to join the Collaboration in the coming month.

The Authorisation Services activity will benefit from the membership of INTERSECT. One of the proposed members of INTERSECT is Macquarie University which holds much of the expertise in this area.

Australian Access Federation (AAF)

Work is progressing on the implementation of the technical aspects of the AAF. Microsoft and Mozilla have agreed to include the AAF root certificate in their browsers which will make it easier for users to access resources via the AAF.

The Steering Committee is currently giving consideration to the governance of the AAF. It is envisaged that there will be a high level governing committee that will be responsible for the development and implementation of the AAF's policies and procedures on behalf of its members and interested parties, including Government. There will also be a contracting entity to contract the operating entities responsible for the delivery of AAF services. This contracting entity will also be responsible for supervising the legal agreements for membership under the guidance of the governing committee.

Discussions have taken place with Universities Australia (UA) concerning the establishment of the contracting entity and the UA Board has agreed to assist. It is proposed that UA establish a subsidiary company to act as the AAF contracting entity and it would have a board comprising two or possibly three members responsible for the day to day management of the company. There would also be a governing committee responsible for setting policy and the future directions of the AAF. The membership of this committee would be drawn from the existing AAF Steering Committee initially to ensure continuity. Day to day administrative operations would be provided under contract by staff drawn from Higher Education Services, another subsidiary of UA.

An AAF brochure has been produced and distributed to the 1200 delegates at the recent AusCERT conference (a copy will be made available on the day). It is intended that a similar brochure will be produced, tailored to a broader audience for general distribution. It is expected that the AAF will commence operations by the end of 2008 with institutions and service providers joining progressively during 2009.

ANDS

The ANDS Establishment Project Management Committee has continued to meet regularly, and has satisfied the second of the two funding milestones. The ANDS Organising Node (ANDS ON) has also been established and is responsible for the development of the Business Plan, as well as contributing to the other deliverables. ANDS ON comprises:

- Chair: Dr Andrew Treloar (Monash)
- ANU members: Dr Adrian Burton, Ms Margaret Henty, Mr Chris Blackall
- CSIRO members: Dr Ross Wilkinson, Ms Tracey Hind, Mr John Morrissey

The ANDS Technical Working Group will be convened for a meeting on 5 June to discuss the way forward for ANDS, specifically to provide feedback on the Interim Draft Business Plan for ANDS.

Co-investments with ARCS in NeAT projects have been finalised, and details of these are included in the ARCS Business Plan.

It has become evident that the timeframes for delivery of the ANDS Establishment Project are unable to be met, hence renegotiation of the ANDS contract to move the timeframes out will commence shortly. The ANDS PMC indicated that it was keen to move the project timeframe and milestones as little as possible so that ANDS proper can be commenced as soon as possible. Recent correspondence from the ANDS PMC has requested an extension and consequent extension of milestones by three months.

Deliverables

The remaining deliverables for the ANDS Establishment Project are:

- a detailed ANDS Business Plan for the period 1 July 2008-30 June 2009, including budget information;
- an NCRIS Funding Agreement and a collaboration agreement for the delivery of ANDS from 1 July 2008;
- a selection process (including international search) leading to an offer of employment for the ANDS Executive Director. The Executive Director must be acceptable to DIISR on the advice of AeRIC prior to an offer being made; and
- a Final Report on the ANDS Establishment Project.

DIISR expects to receive an Interim Draft Business Plan from ANDS in late May or early June.

NeAT

A list of the first round of NeAT projects has been supplied as an attachment to the ARCS Annual Business Plan for AeRIC's consideration.

Other potential NeAT projects are still under discussion but have yet to be approved. Any new projects which go ahead in the period will need to have a project proposal approved by NeAT, and a detailed Business Plan and Project Plan approved by ARCS and ANDS.

Principles for governance and administration of NeAT projects have also been provided in the ARCS Business Plan, as agreed between ARCS and the ANDS Establishment Project.

NeAT will revisit the task of mapping the Australia eResearch architecture later in the year, following the outcome of the NCRIS Roadmap Review.

Considering the available \$12 million of cash funding across ARCS and ANDS:

- Proto-NeAT activities have expended approximately \$525k (4%)
- The 6 approved agreed Projects expend approximately a further 50%
- The remaining potential projects that might be agreed in the first round are estimated to expend approximately a further 15%
- Therefore about 30% of the \$12 million is available for the second round which would become part of the 2009-10 Business Plans for ARCS and ANDS
- It follows that only approximately five additional significant integrative projects can be implemented during the remainder of the NCRIS funding period.

Total project contributions and associated total cost can be estimated as follows.

- The Projects total to an expenditure of \$2.45 million from NeAT funds in 2008-09.
- That funding is leveraging significant in-kind contributions from service providers and discipline communities including an in-kind contribution of more than 28 EFTs.
- As an estimate, we can apply the Australian Research Council's standard in-kind multiplier of 1.25 based on salary plus on-costs; which are expected to be approximately \$100k giving a total average cost per EFT of $\$100k + \$125k = \$225k$.
- As some staff (as in the MARCS) will have lower cost structures, and as some funds will be provided to support non salary costs, a reasonable and conservative estimate can be derived by taking 80% of this number as the basis for estimating a minimum in-kind contribution.

- Therefore in the case of effort funded through NeAT, as ARCS (for example) has agreed to provide \$120k from PfC funds, each EFT will entail an in-kind contribution of \$60k. So that if NeAT provides \$2.45m in cash, the total cost of that effort will be about \$3.6m.
- The 28 in-kind EFT equates to a further \$5m leading to a total project value of \$8.6m per year, ensuring NeAT funds are a minority component of the overall project costs.

NCRIS Roadmap Review

Of the 80 submissions received in response to the NCRIS Roadmap Review Discussion Paper released 18 June, 13 are ICT-specific or contain significant comment on ICT. Generally, all submissions contain some remarks on ICT and especially data management and expertise.

There is strong support for recognising the importance of ICT as a prominent underpinning capability to NCRIS. However, while there is good recognition of the need to elevate ICT's role in NCRIS, there is considerably less commentary about the way forward. (Few respondents directly answered the questions posed in the ICT chapter).

The NCRIS Committee met on 26 May and agreed with the positioning of ICT as an integrative platform rather than a 16th capability.

There is some (not widespread) recognition that investment in ICT activities must come from within the capabilities as well as a dedicated ICT investment stream in NCRIS.

The ICT Strategy Group is meeting on 5 June and will draw from the discussions of other Expert Working Groups to inform the approaches to ICT that will be mapped out in the Exposure Draft of the revised Roadmap.

There has been strong support for a separate humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) capability under NCRIS. Most of their initial requirements are data management related, and include digitisation. In framing an approach to ICT in the Roadmap, special consideration may need to be given to HASS.

Action

Members note the report

AeRIC Executive Director

May 2008