

Canberra observed



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Government scuttles 'Marshall Plan' and instructs CSIRO to conduct long-term public good strategic research

Billed as an entrepreneur and Silicon Valley veteran, 54 year old Larry Marshall must have looked like a good choice in 2014 to take the 100 year old CSIRO into an age of innovation and digital applications.

However, he put the cat among the pigeons in 2015 when he cut the organisation's environmental and climate change programmes and handed out redundancies left, right and centre to world renowned scientists. His actions generated national and global protests because these cuts undermined Australia's international responsibilities to global treaties – as specified in CSIRO's

enabling Act. Furthermore, they reduced our national capabilities to manage our land and sea resources.

How the CSIRO Board allowed this to happen, and why the previous Minister, Christopher Pyne, did not intervene is a mystery, particularly as CSIRO can be instructed by the Minister to undertake scientific research for 'any other purpose determined by the Minister'.

Fortunately, Minister Hunt did the right thing. He undertook a wide-ranging review and the result is a new Statement of Expectations for the organisation. On 19 November he announced that in the future: 'The paramount vision for CSIRO is to become the world's premier public research organisation over the coming decade and to apply its knowledge for the benefit of all Australians'.

The key priorities have been identified as:

- Pioneering in plant biology and agriculture.
- Enabling development of new research and technologies for human health, food and nutrition, and biosecurity.
- Leading climate change science, mitigation and adaptation research, including decadal forecasting as part of the work of the Climate Science Centre.
- Developing new environmental research and technologies for air, land, water and oceans.
- Collaborating with industry to help sustainably manage our resources,

mining equipment and energy sectors.

- Collaborating across the research community to maintain and build our astronomy capability.
- Collaborating with industry to help develop our advanced manufacturing capabilities.
- Collaborating with industry to improve Australia's digital and data management capabilities.

This is a completely different approach to Larry Marshall's focus on short-term start-up research companies and it sets a solid basis for the future

The Minister also encouraged CSIRO to develop additional priorities based on its engagement with staff and the broader community, including industry and academia.

As Minister Hunt stated:

These outcomes will continue to improve Australians' quality of life with better health, food production and quality, environmental resilience, and economic capability., and:

To assist in achieving this, staffing levels will rise and funding for CSIRO will increase from \$1.35 billion to \$1.465 billion over the next four years.

This is a completely different approach to Larry Marshall's focus on short-term start-up research companies and it sets a solid basis for the future. Why the CSIRO Board extended Marshall's appointment earlier this year for a further term, when his core policies were likely to overturned by the Minister, is another mystery.



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