

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Budget Estimates Hearing 2009-10
01 June 2009

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: INNOVATION, INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

TOPIC: Australian Stem Cell Centre

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard 1 June 2009, E128)

QUESTION No.: BI-100

Senator ABETZ—It was just a general question. We were kindly supplied with the review of the ASCC last time, and I am wondering in general terms if I could be given a one- or two-page brief or summary update into what—

Senator Carr—We will give you an update. There have been some changes with the Stem Cell Centre boards and various other things. We will give you an update.

ANSWER

The second scheduled Review of the Australian Stem Cell Centre (ASCC) was conducted in 2008. The Review provided an independent analysis of the ASCC's operations, giving particular regard to scientific performance and commercial strategy.

The Review identified achievements of the ASCC in fostering and funding stem cell research in Australia and in representing Australian stem cell science internationally. However, the Review also identified problems with the direction of the Centre particularly in terms of its research management and governance strategies.

The Review also identified a fundamental need for the ASCC to communicate more effectively with its key stakeholders and research staff, and to foster a clear vision of the Centre's Objective. The final Review Report, approved by the Commonwealth in November 2008, provided 34 recommendations. The recommendations addressed the need for the ASCC to reassess the purpose and identity of the Centre, focus on retaining key personnel, evaluate the corporate structure of the Centre and develop plans for the operation of the Centre post BCE funding in 2011.

There were a number of changes to the governance and management at the ASCC during 2008. The ASCC Board replaced the CEO, Professor Stephen Livesey, on 29 July 2008. On 5 September 2008, the member institutions (Monash University, Howard Florey Institute, University of Queensland and University of Adelaide) appointed 3 new interim Board members. These appointments were approved by the Commonwealth. Following this, the former Board resigned.

The interim Board comprised of Professor Edwina Cornish, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Monash University, Professor David Siddle, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) University of Queensland and Dr Henry de Aizpurua, Howard Florey Institute. Professor Graham Macdonald was appointed as the interim independent Chairman on 19 September 2008.

Following the finalisation of the 2008 Review, the ASCC management, under the guidance of the interim Board, undertook to develop a new strategic plan for the Centre. The Centre worked hard to communicate this new direction with its scientists and stakeholders. During this time, the

Department and the Australian Research Council worked closely with the Centre to ensure that this new approach was incorporated into the Centre's 2009-10 Business Plan, and that many of the recommendations of the 2008 Review were implemented. Specifically the ASCC sought to address their science strategy, commercialisation strategy, and overall governance strategies.

On 5 February 2009 Professor Joe Sambrook was appointed as interim Scientific Director of the ASCC. Under Professor Sambrook's direction the Centre made changes to its research funding strategy and called for new funding applications in early 2009. In April 2009, six new Directors were appointed to the ASCC Board: Dr Graeme Blackman, Dr Chris Juttner, Dr Peter Riddles, Professor Richard Smallwood, Professor Brandon Wainwright and Professor Steve Wesselingh. Professor Macdonald was also appointed as permanent Chair of the Board.

The ASCC submitted its confidential 2009-10 Business Plan to the Commonwealth on 3 April 2009. On 26 June 2009 the Commonwealth approved the 2009/10 Business Plan, noting the improvements the Centre has made to its scientific, commercialisation and governance strategies. The Business Plan addresses many of the Review recommendations. A number of the recommendations relating to issues of governance will be addressed by the new Board in the 2009-10 financial year. The Commonwealth will continue to regularly engage with the ASCC, and monitor the Centre's performance with regular reporting.

As at 29 June 2009 Biotechnology Centre of Excellence (BCE) payments to the ASCC totalling \$76.80 million (excluding GST) have been approved (\$39.05 million by Innovation and \$40.50 million by the ARC).