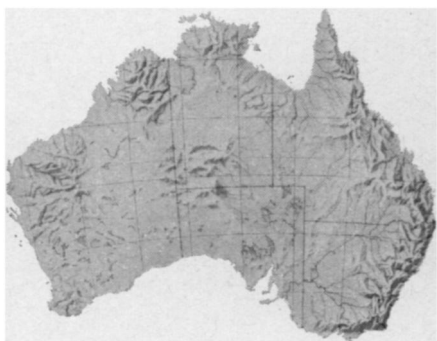


LETTER FROM CANBERRA



Squeeze on private research

In the midst of plenty, nongovernment scientists are feeling the pinch

by Lennard Bickel

In a booming economy, surrounded by finds of vast mineral deposits, nongovernment scientists in Australia find themselves facing a growing financial crisis.

Workers at universities and in specialized institutions are struggling against a receding tide of funds as the effects of United States budget cuts spread across the water. And as is the case in the U.S., vital home government funds are being sacrificed to defense needs in Vietnam where Australia is supporting the U.S.

Defense spending has zoomed to \$1.4 billion—three times what was allotted to the universities for the last three years. The main blows are falling on classical areas of research: Hundreds of projects, ranging from cancer research, antibiotics and immunosuppressant drug research to cosmic radiation studies, are feeling the pinch.

Three years ago the Federal Government began to drop its funding for university research from \$17 million to \$9 million over the three-year period, and has now just published its lowest funding for individual research for three years.

Coincident with this is a marked falling away of public interest. Donations to medical foundations are shrinking, raising the threat of abandonment of long-term projects.

The National Medical Research Council has diverted money to save some of these projects, but this has cut the council's ability to follow up new promising leads in areas which traditionally depend on it.

At the famed Walter and Eliza Hall Institute falling funds from the public and United States sources mean a deficit of \$200,000 this year. This threatens the pace of work on induced immunological techniques; 20 percent of the institution's projects may be dumped.

Such centers have lost roughly \$1 million from U.S. support in the last year, and feed-offs from Government controlled channels are down hundreds of thousands of dollars.

And while the amounts are small compared to the current annual Federal research bill of around \$150 million, the paring is keenly felt in the areas which traditionally receive a segment.

The biggest single bite of the \$150 million is swallowed by the 3,000 scientists in the Government's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), which mainly works along lines of pay-off to

the economy. CSIRO gets \$42 million, 28 percent of the total.

Weapons research and central Government support for special armed forces projects, the Woomera rocket range and joint tasks with British and United States agencies syphon off another \$30 million.

Another \$18 million goes into pursuit of peaceful uses of atomic energy, in grants to encourage industrial research, science studies in schools, and individual projects which are recommended by the nation's Research Grants Committee.

It was this backdrop that brought added interest to the visit to Australia last month of a United States mission headed by President Johnson's science adviser, Dr. Donald F. Hornig.

The eight days of survey and talk ended with an embracing five-year agreement. The aim of the agreement is to widen the flow of exchange workers in already-established associations and to create new areas where both nations can benefit. These include joint projects in the Southeast Asian region, outside Australia.

Focal points for this endeavor will be the National Science Foundation in the U.S. and the Australian Federal Ministry of Education and Science.

Areas designated for early action include joint projects in arid zone research, weather modification and global atmosphere studies, new methods of mineral exploration and exploitation and the location of underground water resources.

In biology are projects including a study of the underwater life of the 1,500-mile Great Barrier Reef and joint projects aimed at health and social studies of the people of Papua, New Guinea and the southwest Pacific.

Australian Science Minister Malcolm Fraser declares that the scheme would encourage nongovernment science, but neither he nor the American mission mentioned money. University and nongovernment scientists would participate through the official agencies of both countries.

Investment by industry on its own original research is another issue with international overtones: It is only 0.15 percent of the gross national product, a recent survey of 500 industrial firms found.

Since many Australian industries are foreign owned, parent firms in the United States and Britain are accused of using Australian locations as mere technological branch offices.