Funding and Resourcing for the CSIRO

CSIRO STAFF ASSOCIATION

3 FEBRUARY 2026

Senate Standing Committees on Economics
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: economics.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Chair,

Funding and Resourcing for the CSIRO

The CSIRO Staff Association is a section of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). We represent staff in the CSIRO, including scientists, technical staff, support and administrative staff. Our members work in a range of areas, and we are committed to providing a strong voice for our members in key public policy and political debates.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into funding and resourcing for the CSIRO. This submission draws on recent developments within CSIRO and more than 400 responses to a recent CSIRO Staff Association member survey[1] that focused on the significant job cuts announced over the past 18 months, their impacts on research capacity, staff morale, and the maintenance of scientific infrastructure. The submission outlines the impact of these cuts and recommends immediate and sustainable funding measures to restore and support CSIRO's critical role in Australia's research and development ecosystem.

The CSIRO Staff Association is happy to provide further information regarding any of the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other relevant issues.

If you require further information, please contact Osmond Chiu, Senior Policy and Research Officer, via email at [redacted]

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

Susan Tonks
CSIRO Section Secretary

[1] CSIRO Staff Association Survey (December 2025- January 2026).

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CSIRO Staff Association Submission to the Senate Economics References Committee

Inquiry into Funding and Resourcing for the CSIRO

Introduction

CSIRO plays an irreplaceable role in delivering world-leading science and innovation that underpins Australia's prosperity, security, and wellbeing. The current funding and resourcing challenges, if left unaddressed, will have lasting negative impacts on Australia's research capability and international standing.

Urgent action is needed to protect CSIRO's capacity to deliver public good science and maintain Australia's global standing. As one member explained:

> *"The cumulative effect of funding cuts, job losses, and reduced support for early-career researchers is seen as a threat to Australia's scientific sovereignty, productivity, and ability to address existential challenges like climate change, environmental degradation, and public health."*

Immediate and long-term funding, coupled with transparent and consultative decision-making, is essential to restore and sustain CSIRO's capacity to serve the nation.

The nature of recent and proposed job and program cuts in the CSIRO

Over the past year, CSIRO has experienced a total of 818 announced job losses, with a further 350 positions flagged for redundancy as of 18 November 2025. These reductions are spread across various research domains, including environment, health and biosecurity, agriculture and food, and minerals research. The scale of the job cuts to CSIRO under the Albanese Labor government now surpasses the previous cuts to CSIRO under the Abbott Government.[2]

Key details of the most recent job cuts to date include:

- More than 400 science support roles eliminated at the outset of the restructure.
- 120 positions removed from CSIRO's digital and data division, Data61, representing nearly 20% of its workforce.
- 30 roles lost from the Agriculture and Food Research Unit and 43 from Health and Biosecurity, with 5 from Manufacturing Research.
- CSIRO's Enterprise Services have seen 76 jobs cut from Information Management and Technology (IMT) Client Services.
- Further reductions across research programs, with the number of active programs slated to be reduced from approximately 95 to between 50 and 75, although the specific targeted programs remain unspecified.

Information about proposed further cuts to Research Units was provided to the Town Hall meetings of staff on 19 November 2025. According to slide presentations, Research Unit cuts included:

[2] CSIRO Staff Association. (2025, November 18). *Worse than Abbott: CSIRO faces deeper cuts*. Retrieved from https://csirostaff.org.au/news/media/2025/11/18/worse-than-abbott-csiro-faces-deeper-cuts/

- Environment
    - Current: 715 FTE
    - Proposed reduction: 130-150 FTE (18-21%)
- Health and Biosecurity
    - Current: 329 FTE
    - Proposed reduction: 100-110 FTE (30-33%)
- Agriculture and Food
    - Current: 644 FTE
    - Proposed reduction: 45-55 FTEs (7-8.5%)
- Minerals
    - Current: 364 FTE
    - Proposed reduction: 25-35 FTE (7-10%)

Nearly a fifth (19%) of Programs of Research are not progressing, though some activities may be reallocated. Programs of Research not progressing include:

- Increasing healthy years of life
- Carbon management technologies
- Climate intelligence and advice
- Unlocking net zero
- Waste
- Valuing and restoring biodiversity, nature and healthy ecosystems.

These job losses have been accompanied by inconsistent and limited communication from CSIRO management, particularly in areas such as Data61 and the Environment Research Unit. Notably, the cuts to Data61 proceeded despite previous public assurances to the contrary.

Staff have expressed serious concerns about the lack of transparency and consultation surrounding the newly proposed Programs of Research. Key decisions appear to have been made regarding new Programs of Research without input from existing research areas or external reviews, and CSIRO undertook a closed application process for the new management units for Program of Research leads. These decisions will shape the direction of future research and carry long-term consequences for public good science, CSIRO's research capability and its ability to innovate. Such a significant process must be undertaken with the highest levels of scrutiny, integrity and stakeholder engagement.

The importance of public funding for public good science

In our submission to the Economic Reform Roundtable, we warned that Australia's long-term productivity and innovation capacity is being actively undermined by aggressive job cuts and underinvestment in the public institution that powers research, science and economic growth.[3]

Public investment in R&D is often what delivers innovation that lays the groundwork for commercial breakthroughs and increased productivity. The CSIRO has been responsible for some

[3] Community and Public Sector Union. (2025, November 18). *CSIRO faces deep cuts as Govt spruiks productivity agenda*. Retrieved from https://www.cpsu.org.au/CPSU/Content/Media_releases/CSIRO_faces_deep_cuts_as_Govt_spruiks_productivity_agenda.aspx

of the most important scientific innovations in Australia's history, including the invention of Wi-Fi, plastic bank notes, Aerogard and the Hendra virus vaccine.

Staff commented on the importance of the work that CSIRO does:

> *"CSIRO provides advice that no other institution in Australia can provide – and maintains a large array of facilities for the nation. These include climate modelling, animal health and disease, air quality monitoring, bushfire response, fisheries management advice, water management, agricultural management, health and well being, energy usage forecasts, manufacturing R&D etc. The benefit of these is clear – long term, stable and world-leading expertise is available on demand."*

> *"If CSIRO is cut in the areas that are proposed, the demand and requirements for governments to access this research does not simply evaporate. So cuts at CSIRO simply shift the cost to the Aust Government into paying another provider. And when there is no other organisation that can provide the scientific expertise at the same level, then the costs will go up and the quality will go down. So there is no real saving to be had."*

Fundamental research lacking industry partners is particularly vulnerable to cuts. Survey respondents stressed that such research is essential for public good but often lacks direct commercial funding streams.

Half of all staff surveyed said they were aware of basic or fundamental research conducted by CSIRO that lacked industry funding partners and may be affected by proposed cuts. Examples included research related to air quality and smoke detection, the integration of long-term field modelling with complex vadose modelling, biotechnology and climate modelling research.

While the $233m in funding announced in 2026-27 MYEFO is welcome and will address urgent pressures at the CSIRO, it is a one-off injection that will not address long-term funding issues.[4] CSIRO faces rising research costs above the rate of inflation, increased expenditure on the maintenance of extensive scientific and research infrastructure, and ongoing capital and depreciation costs far exceeding current capital funding. For example, capital and depreciation costs were $169.7 million in 2023-24 against capital funding of only $80 million.[5]

Over the last 15 years, the indexation of CSIRO's appropriation has averaged just 1.3% per annum, markedly lower than the average annual inflation rate of 2.7%.[6] Property maintenance costs have increased by 17% over the last five years.[7] The indexation arrangements for capital appropriations have not been updated since 1999-2000, resulting in ageing facilities and equipment, with associated health, safety, and regulatory risks.[8]

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[4] Community and Public Sector Union. (2026, January). *Staff Association secures $233 million CSIRO funding boost*. Retrieved from https://www.cpsu.org.au/CPSU/Content/Media_releases/Staff_Association_Secures_233_million_CSIRO_Funding_Boost.aspx
[5] CSIRO. (2025). *Incoming government briefing*. Retrieved from https://www.csiro.au/en/about/Corporate-governance/Access-to-information/Freedom-Of-Information/2025-26
[6] CSIRO. (2025). *Incoming government briefing*. Retrieved from https://www.csiro.au/en/about/Corporate-governance/Access-to-information/Freedom-Of-Information/2025-26
[7] CSIRO. (2025). *Incoming government briefing*. Retrieved from https://www.csiro.au/en/about/Corporate-governance/Access-to-information/Freedom-Of-Information/2025-26
[8] CSIRO. (2025). *Incoming government briefing*. Retrieved from https://www.csiro.au/en/about/Corporate-governance/Access-to-information/Freedom-Of-Information/2025-26

The cost of doing science continues to rise, and ageing national research infrastructure requires sustained capital investment. Without a permanent real increase to funding for Australia's peak science agency, the CSIRO will continue to face uncertainty.

Staff have called for transparency and accountability from CSIRO Executive regarding the organisation's financial management and assurances that the cycle will not continue to undermine research, create instability and lead to further staffing cuts.

The importance of public resourcing of Australian sovereign scientific capability

CSIRO funding ensures Australia retains expertise in managing the environment so it can underpin our ongoing prosperity such as through climate science (ACCESS model), groundwater quality, biotechnology and recycling technologies. Australia's reputation as a leader in mineral exploration data and methods is hugely beneficial to the Australian economy, while our biosecurity research is critical for Australian agriculture.

Staff provided examples of the importance of maintaining sovereign capability:

> *"CSIRO, as demonstrated in the pandemic, creates a backstop – where a capability is suddenly required, we have the breadth of skills and the mechanisms to kickstart it.""*

> *"Understanding climate change impacts in Australia and co-producing appropriate solutions with partners requires knowledge and capabilities that are grounded in the Australian context– researchers in other nations have little incentive to generate knowledge and solutions that are specifically informed by and tailored to Australian social-ecological systems."*

> *"No other nation or private interest will look out for potentially non-profitable research into the wellbeing of Australian people, environmental impacts and stability."*

Loss of funding would mean losing independent, sovereign capability, making Australia reliant on foreign expertise and risking national interests in areas like water security, climate projection and pandemic preparedness.

The recruitment and retention of staff including senior and mid-career researchers, along with the training and career paths of early-career researchers

CSIRO's training and career pathways for early-career researchers (ECRs) are valued for nurturing future scientific leaders and maintaining core expertise, ensuring the next generation of scientists can build the knowledge required to manage Australia's unique challenges. There are often limited postdoctoral and entry-level research positions in some disciplines and research grants programs are extremely competitive. CSIRO's post-doctoral fellowship program provides one avenue for early career researchers in Australia.

> *"CSIRO is a unique place for training early career researchers with access to national scale and transdisciplinary work not possible at universities."*

However, recent cuts and reduced opportunities are driving talent overseas, risking a brain drain and diminishing Australia's competitiveness in emerging scientific fields. Staff have reported that the loss of senior and mid-career researchers has led to the discontinuation or dilution of critical research projects, particularly in climate modelling and groundwater quality. The loss of institutional memory and mentoring capacity is seen as a major threat to Australia's ability to respond to future scientific challenges.

> *"The loss of senior staff creates a 'mentoring gap' where 20+ years of institutional knowledge in groundwater quality is not being passed down. The consequence will be a future failure in Australia's ability to respond to emerging environmental crises."*
>
> *"I have inherited the work of three seniors because of attrition. This led to my severe burnout and lower productivity."*
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> *"CSIRO until recently, used to be the premier research location in Australia with an unparalleled access to world leading researchers and a chance to be part of globally important scientific research that directly informs Australia's policies and made real impact. Under the last CEO and now with the current executive, this cannot be said. I would struggle to recommend CSIRO to an ECR now."*
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> *"The early-career researchers of today will be the pioneers of tomorrow. If Australia continues on its path of inadequate funding of ECR, then they will be forced to go overseas to pursue their career, which equates to a loss of high-calibre researchers with their brilliant minds and discoveries."*

Adequately funding the CSIRO provides a pathway for researchers to contribute to Australian innovation and stems the loss of highly skilled talent from Australia.

The role and independence of the CSIRO's leadership in making resourcing allocation decisions

There is widespread concern that CSIRO leadership does not fully understand or consult staff about the importance of specific scientific work when making resource allocation decisions. Respondents described a disconnect between executive management and the realities faced by researchers, with decisions often prioritising short-term fiscal metrics over long-term scientific capability.

Over 66% of CSIRO staff surveyed do not believe the CSIRO leadership understands the importance of specific scientific work when making resource allocation decisions and over 80% of staff surveyed do not believe CSIRO leadership genuinely consults staff about priorities before making resource allocation decisions.

CSIRO's current budget challenge is partially attributable to the conclusion of the COVID-19 appropriation funding of $459.2 million (2021-2024), which ended in June 2024.[9] This funding was intended as a temporary measure to offset revenue shortfalls during the pandemic.

[9] CSIRO. (2025). *Incoming government briefing*. Retrieved from https://www.csiro.au/en/about/Corporate-governance/Access-to-information/Freedom-Of-Information/2025-26

However, there is concern that CSIRO's Executive did not adequately plan for the predictable withdrawal of this one-off funding and make the case for a permanent, real increase in funding.

There are concerns about transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. For example, McKinsey Consulting was commissioned in 2022 at a cost of $742,500 (nearly $30,000 a day), for less than a month of work with no report required, to advise on the 'Future Ways of Working' program to streamline organisational processes. McKinsey Consulting was previously engaged by CSIRO at a cost of $1.2m between October 2021 and March 2022. An FOI request related to the project contract provided no evidence that other suppliers were approached and that the outputs primarily consisted of PowerPoint presentations and talking points for the CSIRO Executive about 'Ways of Working'.[10]

These instances raise questions about resource allocation decisions by the CSIRO leadership. Staff were firmly of the view that the role of management should also be scrutinised:

> *"There is a profound inequity in an organisation where researchers are burdened with the administrative labour of 'hollowed out' support units while 'top-heavy' management remains disconnected from the human and technical consequences of their decisions."*

> *"This Inquiry must examine whether the current 'corporate' leadership model is compatible with CSIRO's mandate to serve the public good. We are seeing a shift where administrative neatness and executive rewards are prioritised over the sovereign scientific expertise required to keep Australia's water and environment safe."*

The long-term capability needs of the CSIRO, including workforce, infrastructure and equipment

Inadequate resources pose significant barriers to effective research. Nearly 25% of survey respondents reported that poor equipment hindered their work, while over 40% pointed to inadequate infrastructure as a challenge in the workplace. Significantly, almost 95% identified insufficient staffing as a critical barrier to conducting effective research. These issues have led to project delays, increased stress, and reduced research quality. Bureaucratic hiring processes and under-resourced support units further exacerbate these problems.

> *"Much of our work is hampered by lack of access to the best equipment and a lack of trained staff in our research area. This slows the rate at which we can work and puts extra burden on us."*

Reductions to Enterprise Services and maintenance teams have created safety and governance risks. Cuts to the CSIRO Business and Infrastructure Services (CBIS) team, responsible for facility maintenance and safety (including water supply safety), jeopardise both research staff and community safety. The majority of these losses have occurred at the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP), a high-risk profile facility containing biosafety Level 4 labs where highly dangerous pathogens such as Ebola are studied.[11]

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[10] The Mandarin. (2025, November 20). *CSIRO pays McKinsey $742,500 for advice—no report required*. Retrieved from https://www.themandarin.com.au/304845-csiro-pays-mckinsey-742500-for-advice-no-report-required/

[11] ABC (2025, 15 Sept). *'Inside the Australian lab where scientists study bird flu and other emerging disease threats'.* < https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2025-09-15/avian-influenza-acdp-emerging-diseases-pandemic-ebola-hendra/105757118>

The strain on remaining staff is notable, with increased workload and administrative burdens detracting from core research responsibilities. Understaffing is resulting in unsafe work practices and increased operational risks.

Results from the 2025 CSIRO Culture Survey indicate a significant decline in staff morale. There is a pervasive lack of confidence in the organisation's strategic direction and in the executive team's ability to manage change without adversely affecting CSIRO's reputation. The uncertainty and scale of job losses has eroded trust and undermined staff engagement.

The effects of these cuts on the program of scientific work conducted by the CSIRO

The ongoing and proposed job cuts have significantly diminished CSIRO's research capacity. Critical expertise and experience have been lost, with the potential for major research projects to be aborted mid-way, undermining years of scientific progress. For instance, the cessation of research into high amylose wheat (beneficial for digestive health and disease prevention) and allergen-free egg white products exemplifies the loss of long-term, high-impact scientific initiatives.

The digital and data research arm, Data61, once home to one of the largest concentrations of artificial intelligence and data science expertise globally, has been substantially weakened. The loss of Data61 staff has already resulted in the termination of key projects, such as flood management research in Northern Australia.

Additionally, CSIRO will no longer conduct clinical trial research following cuts to the Health and Biosecurity Research Unit, leading to the closure of the clinical trial unit at Westmead Hospital and withdrawal from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute.

CSIRO conducts extensive work in collaboration with the private sector or with other organisations such as universities. Almost half of all staff surveyed said that this collaborative work is at risk due to funding cuts or restructuring.

> *"…the organisation's prestige alone is no longer enough to offset delays and uncertainty. Partners increasingly seek fast, more predictable collaboration pathways and CSIRO's current instability makes it harder to compete for projects we would previously have led."*

Critical research areas currently at risk include climate modelling, groundwater integrity, marine research, recycling technologies, and biosecurity. Collaborations with government, industry, and Indigenous communities are threatened by funding cuts and restructuring, potentially undermining long-standing partnerships and national initiatives.

Recommendations

Immediate Measures

- Provide an immediate additional funding injection of approximately $252.3 million to halt and reverse the loss of 1,168 staff in the 2026-27 Budget.
- Intervene to suspend further job cuts pending an independent, external investigation into CSIRO's restructure, ensuring transparency and accountability in this process.

Longer-Term Resourcing

- Increase CSIRO's appropriations in the forward estimates to ensure ongoing increases do not fall below CPI, with projections indicating a need for an additional $68.4 million in 2026-27, $79.7 million in 2027-28, and $90.8 million in 2028-29 to maintain no real decrease.
- Review and update indexation arrangements for capital and operational funding to reflect current and projected research cost increases and infrastructure needs by guaranteeing indexation will at least match the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to stabilise CSIRO's finances.
- Commit to a sustained increase in CSIRO funding as a proportion of GDP to rebuild and maintain research capability.

Transparency and Accountability

- Release of all McKinsey Consulting's 'Future Ways of Working' documents to staff and stakeholders and engage in genuine consultation regarding organisational reforms.
- Implement ongoing independent oversight of major restructuring processes affecting CSIRO's workforce and research programs.

Adopting these measures in the 2026-27 Budget will provide both immediate relief and a foundation for the long-term sustainability of CSIRO's contribution to Australia's research and innovation landscape.