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Harnessing science, technology and innovation (STI) for a more peaceful and sustainable future

Madam President, fellow delegates,

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this important issue on behalf of the Australian Parliament.

Australia has long recognised the importance of science, technology and innovation to our economic growth, social wellbeing and national cohesion.

In 2022, Australia was ranked in the top 20 countries in science, innovation and technology.

And our scientific institutions consistently rank in the world's top 1 per cent in 15 fields of research, including space science, physics, computer science and clinical medicine.

Australians depend on science and research to increase productivity, achieve sustainable economic growth, create jobs and improve national wellbeing.

National Science Statement

In August this year, Australia released its new [Science Statement](#) along with five National Science and Research Priorities. The statement provides a framework to shape science policy and leadership for the next ten years and highlights the science and research collaborations that Australia will need to solve its greatest challenges.

One of the five priorities which support the statement is 'building a secure and resilient nation'. This priority will see Australia strengthening its democratic institutions and freedoms while addressing challenges from foreign interference, mis- and disinformation and polarisation. By

strengthening our resilience, Australia will be able to respond to the shocks caused by climate change, natural disasters, political tensions, rapid technological changes and more competition for resources and supply chains.

The elevation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems is another of the key priorities which will ensure that Indigenous scientists contribute complementary approaches to knowledge gathering and interpretation of the national environment. Australia's Indigenous people have an unbroken connection to the lands, waters and skies which began 65,000 years ago. The Science Statement recognises this connection as a source of deep knowledge which is unique to the world.

Science Meets Parliament

The importance of science to Australia's future is complemented by opportunities for effective dialogue and engagement between policy makers and scientists.

For the last 24 years, we have held an annual [Science Meets Parliament](#) event in Australia's Parliament, bringing together parliamentarians and professionals in science, technology, engineering and mathematics or STEM.

At this year's event, more than 90 parliamentarians met with 200 scientists and other STEM professionals from across the country to discuss science and public policy over two days.

The initiative enables STEM professionals to share what is at the forefront of Australian scientific discovery directly with parliamentarians.

Parliamentary Friends of Science

To ensure that scientific knowledge and expertise informs decision making in our Parliament, we have established the Parliamentary Friends of Science.

This group was formed in 2012 and meets at Parliament House four times a year to consider new and emerging technology, the future of STEM research and the STEM workforce. In recognition of its bipartisan approach to science, the group is co-chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and a member of the Opposition party.

National Science Week

To encourage greater community engagement in and awareness of science, we hold National Science Week every August. This annual celebration of science and technology encourages younger generations to be fascinated by the world we live in while providing a platform for young scientists around the country.

Over the course of Science Week, more than 1000 events take place around the country including in-person events, virtual tours, webcasts, talks, DIY experiments, citizen science and competitions. These events are delivered by universities, schools, research institutions, libraries, museums and science centres.

Scientific engagement and exchange in the Pacific

Australia is also deepening our social, economic and scientific ties with Pacific nations in our region to address shared challenges, including responding to climate change, digital connectivity and transitioning to net zero.

Science and technology collaborations are a key part of supporting economic growth and prosperity in our region. The Australian Government committed to a \$10.5 million grant to coordinate and elevate the Pacific region's active participation in science globally.

Climate change and resilience in the Pacific

As part of the Pacific family, Australia recognises that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific. We support the Pacific's regional and global advocacy efforts for sustainable development and the management and conservation of the ocean through funding, partnerships and advocacy support.

To complement regional climate change and disaster resilience programs, assistance is also provided through bilateral programs in several Pacific Island nations.

One program is the [Climate and Oceans Support Program](#) whereby Australia has provided \$30 million over six years to support 14 Pacific Meteorological Services to monitor, analyse and communicate information about climate and oceans.

By combining traditional knowledge of Pacific Islander communities with conventional scientific forecasts, the program aims to enhance the capacity of the Pacific Islands to manage and mitigate the impacts of climate variability and tidal events.

Conclusion

Through initiatives including Science Week, Australia seeks to strengthen the involvement of young people across our society. In recognising the importance of dialogue, we provide opportunities for scientists to directly engage parliamentarians to inform policy making in our region, we work with Pacific partners to harness local knowledge and ensure that both Pacific Islander expertise and needs are recognised in global scientific dialogue.

It is important that we as policy makers and parliamentarians harness the potential of people at all levels with an interest in problem-solving and commitment to work together for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

I thank the Assembly.