

Joint submission – 2050 Alliance and the Australian Technology Network of Universities

Horizon Europe implementation consultation

18 September 2026

The [2050 Alliance](#) and [Australian Technology Network of Universities](#) (ATN) welcome Australia's association with Horizon Europe and the opportunity to establish implementation arrangements that maximise Australia's long-term participation and impact. At a time of significant global change, strengthening and diversifying Australia's strategic research and innovation partnerships is increasingly important. Horizon Europe is an important opportunity to deepen Australia's international research and innovation partnerships, connect Australian capability with major international collaborations, and increase the scale and impact of Australian research.

Together, our organisations represent 14 universities with extensive research, industry and international partnerships, serving students and communities across metropolitan, outer-metropolitan and regional Australia.

2050 Alliance

The 2050 Alliance represents nine universities committed to students, communities and Australia's future.

Our universities teach more than 285,000 students across more than 65 metropolitan, outer-metropolitan, regional and remote campuses.

Our universities combine distinctive research capability with deep connections to the communities, industries and regions they serve, and have a high rate of research collaboration with public sector partners. Altogether, this translates research into economic, social and environmental benefits and impact across Australia and globally.

Our nine universities are: Australian Catholic University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University, the University of Canberra, Victoria University and Western Sydney University.

ATN Universities

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN Universities) represents Australia's most applied, industry-connected universities: Curtin University, Deakin University, the University of Newcastle, RMIT University and the University of Technology Sydney.

ATN member universities are a leading component of Australia's applied research system, with a strong track record of delivering real-world impact for the Australian community and economy.

ATN member universities specialise in translating world-class research into increased productivity, new products and better services. Our industry-engaged and multidisciplinary research programs span fields like renewable energy, critical minerals, and advanced manufacturing, as well as critical social science research that directly addresses productivity, resilience and fairness in Australia.

Key messages

- The 2050 Alliance and ATN support Australia's association with Horizon Europe.
- We support the proposed whole-of-nation approach set out by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR), with implementation designed to mobilise the full breadth of Australia's research and innovation capability. The benefits and opportunities of participation must extend across institutions, sectors, disciplines and regions – delivering impact for all Australians.
- This approach should be supported by capability mapping, matchmaking, consortium brokerage and targeted proposal-development support. This will enable us to systematically build the expertise, partnerships and networks required for broad and sustained participation.
- Australia's participation in Horizon Europe should be treated as a long-term opportunity to build national capability. We want to see sustained Australian participation beyond 2027, including the next European Framework Programme. We should treat 2027 as both a participation year and a mobilisation and capability-building year.

Australia will maximise the value of Horizon Europe participation by mobilising the full breadth of its research and innovation capability

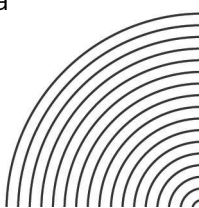
Australia's participation will drive long-term national capability-building across our country if implementation is designed and supported well. To achieve this, we support the proposed whole-of-nation approach.

Australia has developed deep and increasingly distributed research capability across its university system. Over the past two decades, growth in research output, highly cited research, international collaboration and industry collaboration has been particularly strong among the 2050 Alliance and ATN universities, outside Australia's traditional research-intensive institutions. This has broadened Australia's research base and strengthened the capability available across institutions, disciplines and regions. While this growth is considerable, research funding remains highly concentrated. [Published analysis](#) shows the Go8 universities share of national research output declined from 66 per cent to 56 per cent during the period 2006 to 2020, while they continued to receive around two-thirds of university research income.

This pattern is also evident in Australia's participation in Horizon Europe from 2021 onwards where funding is concentrated in traditionally research-intensive institutions. ATN and 2050 Alliance universities attracted just over 6 per cent of total EU funding to Australia whereas the Go8 universities have received roughly 82 per cent of the EU funding awarded.

Australia should translate the whole-of-nation ambition into a practical 'Team Australia' approach. This should systematically identify and mobilise Australian research and innovation capability and existing European connections, including university partnerships and European hubs, research infrastructure and international research organisation relationships, industry networks and established researcher collaborations.

Existing European relationships should be treated as national assets that can help create new opportunities across the Australian research and innovation system, while Australia continues to build new European connections.



A practical 'Team Australia' approach will:

- ensure broad participation across the Australian research and innovation system,
- map Australian research and innovation capability against Horizon Europe opportunities and Pillar II clusters,
- identify and mobilise existing European connections and build new international networks,
- connect Australian researchers, research organisations and industry with European partners and consortia,
- support domestic matchmaking and consortium development across institutional and sectoral boundaries, and
- build sustainable national Horizon Europe expertise and capability for participation beyond 2027.

The opportunity of participation in Horizon Europe must be accessible across the Australian research and innovation system, and return-on-investment must benefit all Australians. Broad participation is therefore a national capability goal, in addition to an equity goal. Equity should be considered broadly, including who can access partnerships, develop international networks, build research careers and benefit from the knowledge, capability and innovation generated through Horizon Europe.

Horizon Europe participation provides an opportunity to connect more of this Australian capability with international partners, infrastructure, industry and research networks.

To succeed, Australia needs to build the expertise, networks, partnerships and institutional capability to translate Australia's research strengths into successful international collaboration. This includes targeted support where strong research capability exists but is not currently matched by the resources needed to support the identification of opportunities, develop European partnerships, and absorb the cost and risk associated with complex international proposals.

At the same time, Australia should leverage the substantial European and international relationships already held across universities and the wider research and innovation system. The objective should be to expand Australia's overall capacity to participate by connecting existing strengths, opening established networks to new collaborators and creating new pathways into European partnerships.

The NCP network will be central to delivering this whole-of-nation approach.

The National Contact Point (NCP) model should be nationally coordinated, sector-embedded and locally connected

2050 Alliance and ATN advocate for the NCP model to provide accessible support nationally, including for First Nations researchers and communities and regional, rural and remote Australia. Approaches to First Nations participation and engagement should be developed with First Nations research leaders and communities.

We ask that the Government provides clear and sustainable resourcing across the NCP network, with expectations at each tier matched by appropriate resource.



Tier 1: National coordination and triage

We agree that Tier 1 NCPs should sit within DISR. Key design features of Tier 1 NCPs should include national leadership and coordination, European Commission engagement as well as performance monitoring and system-level oversight. DISR should work with the Australian Research Council (ARC) and other relevant government agencies to establish a national baseline of Australian research capability drawing on existing and emerging government and sector data such as the ARC's Research Insights Capability framework. This would support the identification of Australian strengths, existing international connections and opportunities for collaboration, as well as an ability to evaluate and map impact. Tier 1 NCPs should use these insights to connect participants with relevant NCP expertise, networks and Horizon Europe opportunities.

Tier 1 NCPs should also operate a central triage function as a clear national entry point for Horizon Europe enquiries and opportunities. The national visibility provided by this function can support equitable access and identify opportunities for collaboration across institutions and sectors. Critically, the triage function should facilitate access and connections, rather than acting as an assessment point or barrier to participation.

Tier 2: Specialist expertise and European brokerage

We are supportive of Tier 2 NCPs being organised primarily around the six Horizon Europe Pillar II clusters, drawing on existing university and research-sector capability. Tier 2 NCPs can combine subject-matter expertise with strong connections into European research and innovation networks, while sharing opportunities broadly and building knowledge, capability and collaboration. It will be important that Tier 2 NCPs operate with a commitment to sector-wide uplift.

Where Tier 2 functions are hosted within universities and other applicant organisations, they should operate impartially and as a national service consistent with the 'Team Australia' approach. Clear expectations, accountability and resourcing should support equitable access to expertise, brokerage and opportunities.

Tier 2 NCPs should provide support for:

- proposal development,
- active partner search,
- European brokerage and consortium-development support, and
- access to specialist legal, financial, contracting and IP expertise relevant to Horizon Europe participation.

Leverage European connections and networks through partnerships that already exist.

Australia already has a sound network of connections and understanding of the European R&D system. These existing resources should form part of Tier 2 NCPs broad reach.

This could include Australian university campus and hubs already established in Europe, such as at RMIT Europe based in Barcelona and ACU's campus in Rome.

RMIT Europe is the university's research, innovation and learning hub based in Barcelona's innovation district. The hub connects European partners directly to RMIT's academic community and international network. The team of more than 40 specialists in research, partnerships and engagement has helped European businesses, governments and research institutions access expertise, collaboration and talent across Australia and Asia.



ACU's Rome Campus provides another established European base. ACU's global hub supports education and the university's developing European research capability, including strong connections with European universities and institutions uplifting research collaboration, industry partnerships and HDR mobility.

These existing Australian footholds in Europe could support Horizon Europe engagement more broadly, including partnership development, brokerage, researcher connections and consortium formation.

Tier 3: Distributed capability and connections

We propose that DISR build a distributed Tier 3 network across universities, peak bodies, research organisations, research infrastructure, industry and other relevant networks. This could support existing networks to extend the NCP system's reach across institutions, sectors and regions.

Tier 3 NCPs could be used to identify Australian capability, potential participants and existing European relationships and feed these into the national system. They could also facilitate domestic matchmaking and connect researchers and organisations with central triage and relevant Tier 2 expertise.

Where Tier 3 organisations are expected to undertake substantive capability mapping, matchmaking or consortium-development functions, appropriate resourcing should be provided by Government rather than relying on voluntary effort.

Invest in participation before applications are submitted

2050 Alliance and ATN Universities support Model A for the targeting of priority research calls with funding for proposal-development, particularly during the early years of Australian participation. Upfront support can broaden participation by reducing the financial risk of developing complex international proposals and enable more Australian researchers and institutions to build the partnerships and capability needed to compete successfully. In contrast, concentrating support after grants have been secured risks reinforcing existing patterns of participation rather than expanding Australia's overall capability.

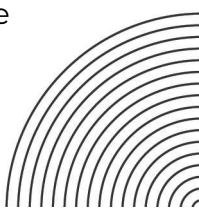
Benefits of funding support at the proposal development stage include:

- building enduring Horizon Europe capability among research support professionals in proposal development, finance, contracting, IP and consortium management.
- supporting researchers to develop European partnerships and consortium capability.
- creating opportunities for ECRs and emerging research leaders to establish European networks and progress towards future consortium leadership.

Horizon Europe also provides an opportunity to rebuild international mobility and network-building opportunities for early-career researchers (ECRs). Targeted mobility schemes to enable Australian ECRs to build international research experience and networks develops the next generation of internationally connected Australian researchers.

Align with national priorities without narrowing participation

2050 Alliance and ATN Universities believe that national priorities should guide and enable participation but should not create an additional eligibility hurdle. National priorities should be used to identify Australian strengths, coordinate engagement and mobilise researchers and industry around strategically important opportunities. We strongly advocate for the



inclusion of technological advancement and AI alongside the breadth of Australian capability relevant to the six Pillar II clusters.

Measure return on investment broadly

We support measuring funding secured and application success, alongside the breadth and distribution of participation, as well as the benefits to Australia. New European partnerships, consortium participation and leadership, repeat participation, industry engagement, regional participation and institutional breadth are also measures of success that should be included. We would also support measuring growth in Horizon Europe capability among researchers and research support professionals. This will support the recognition of benefits to Australia's research workforce, research infrastructure, industry, regions and communities.

2050 Alliance and ATN Universities would welcome the opportunity to discuss further how we can support Australia's participation in Horizon Europe.

Paul Harris

Chief Executive Officer – 2050 Alliance
paul.harris@2050alliance.edu.au

CC: Jodie Haigh
jodie.haigh@2050alliance.edu.au

Dr Andy Marks

Executive Director – Australian
Technology Network of Universities
info@atn.edu.au

CC: Nikini Weragoda
nikini.weragoda@atn.edu.au

