

March 6, 2003

Investments in research and technology building a prosperous future

Edmonton...Thanks to its investments in science and technology, Alberta has "the people, the science and the resources . . . (to) lead not only Canada, but the World," says a report by an International Review Committee assessing the operations of the Alberta Science and Research Authority (ASRA).

"With this international endorsement, Alberta's reputation for excellence is once again validated," said Victor Doerksen, Minister of Innovation and Science. "To ensure our ongoing success, we are committed to working closely with our partners in the public and private sectors. Alberta will continue to be a leader on the global research and development stage."

The report makes nine recommendations to help ASRA and the Alberta government fulfill the province's potential in science and technology. Recommendations include more effectively engaging the private sector's participation in research and development, increasing Alberta's private receptor capacity, continuing to promote science literacy in the province, and encouraging enhanced collaboration among ASRA, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, and the Alberta Ingenuity Fund.

"The Alberta government's vision for a science and innovation advisory body like ASRA is unique in Canada. It is only through benchmarking on a global basis that Albertans can be assured that ASRA's advice and activities have made a difference to the future of Alberta," said Dr. Bob Church, Chair of ASRA. "ASRA's board welcomes the results of the International Review Committee and will use their recommendations as guidelines for future discussions."

Established by the Government of Alberta in 1994, ASRA is an independent board comprised of 25 members from the business and research communities that provides advice to the provincial government. ASRA advises the Minister of Innovation and Science on the strategic direction for Alberta's three priority areas: information and communications technology; life sciences (including agriculture, environment, forestry and health); and energy research. Its goal is to enhance the contribution of science and research to the sustainable prosperity and quality of life for every Albertan.

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See attached backgrounders for list of recommendations and committee membership.

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Backgrounder

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Recommendations by International Review Committee

The *Alberta Science and Research Authority Act* requires an International Expert Review Panel, which must consist of experts from outside government, to review the Alberta Science and Research Authority's (ASRA) operations and submit a report to the Minister of Innovation and Science.

The International Review Panel has made nine recommendations to improve ASRA's performance, and to address development of private sector research and development. The recommendations and the responses of Alberta Innovation and Science are outlined below:

Recommendation 1:

Continue to provide credible, independent, high-quality advice.

Response

: Accept the recommendation and reaffirm the role of the Minister of Innovation and Science through which ASRA provides advice to government.

Recommendation 2:

Strengthen and support the unique relationship between ASRA and Alberta Innovation and Science.

Response

: Alberta Innovation and Science takes this recommendation as given and will continue to work to strengthen the relationship.

Recommendation 3:

Improve research and development planning and execution with key government departments and the foundations (Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and Alberta Ingenuity Fund).

Response

: Accept this recommendation and continue to support the work of ASRA toward achieving this recommendation. Specifically, the government research and development review process, the Technology and Research Advisory Committee, the Life Sciences Inter-Department Committee are all cases of senior officials from Alberta Innovation and Science, other government departments and the foundations working together to shape research and development directions in the province. Additional progress was made this year through the inclusion of the foundations and departments in ASRA's strategic research policy discussions.

Recommendation 4:

Identify and obtain consensus on research and development objectives, the long-term funding required, and fully engage the private sector.

Response

: Accept the recommendation.

Recommendation 5:

Strengthen ability to finance long-range projects.

Response

: Accept the recommendation. Many provincial organizations, notably the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and the Alberta Ingenuity Fund, have programs that provide multi-year research funding. Alberta Innovation and Science is continuing to work with ASRA and Alberta Finance to develop approaches for addressing this recommendation, especially in the key strategic areas of energy, life sciences, and information and communications technology.

Recommendation 6:

Sponsor a high level task force to identify creative mechanisms to increase the involvement of the private sector in research and development, and technology commercialisation.

Response

: Alberta Innovation and Science accepts the recommendation and work is being undertaken through the ASRA Innovation Task Force and the joint Alberta Economic Development Authority / ASRA Task Force on Access to Capital established by Minister of Innovation and Science Victor Doerksen and Minister of Economic Development Mark Norris. Reports are anticipated in the spring of 2003. Alberta Innovation and Science recognizes that this recommendation is not limited to access to capital and will also be addressing intellectual property issues and other policy matters (or levers) that are necessary to help foster additional private sector participation in the province.

Recommendation 7:

Prepare and deliver an annual "State of the Union" address to the Cabinet on innovation and science.

Response

: Alberta Innovation and Science accepts the intent of this recommendation and will continue to work on informing government and the public through the department's annual report, ASRA's annual financial report, press releases and other communication vehicles.

Recommendation 8:

Help spread the word to the public and private sector about the impressive science literacy of Alberta students and the internationally recognized accomplishments of Albertans in research and development, particularly in life sciences.

Response

: Alberta Innovation and Science accepts the recommendation and will continue to work with Alberta Learning and to support the efforts of other organizations in this area. The department will continue to support Science and Technology Week, and the Alberta Science and Technology (ASTech) Leadership Awards. It will also continue to work with organizations - like the Science Alberta Foundation, BioAlberta, other industry associations, government departments, universities and colleges - to encourage and promote Alberta's science literacy. International profile for both science literacy and research and development accomplishments is generated through joint government-industry initiatives.

Recommendation 9:

Complete the innovation vision, define the tasks and realize the dream.

Response

: Alberta Innovation and Science accepts the recommendation and will continue efforts in this area as described in the business plan for the department.

Backgrounder

International Review Committee Members

Dr. Calvin Stiller - Chair of Committee - CEO of Canadian Medical Discoveries Fund; Professor of Medicine, University of Western Ontario, London, ON.

Dr. Gordon MacNabb - Former Deputy Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources Canada; Founding President of NSERC (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada); Founding President of PRECARN Ltd.; currently a consultant from his home in Appleton, ON.

Dr. Larry Milligan - Former Vice-President Research, University of Guelph; Professor Emeritus, Department of Animal and Poultry Science, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON.

Dr. Peter Morand - Former President of NSERC; President and CEO, Canadian Science and Technology Growth Fund, Ottawa, ON.

Mr. John Oliver - President, Maple Leaf Bio-Concepts, Oshawa, ON.

Dr. Clement Bowman - Coordinator and Secretary - Former President, Alberta Research Council; Founding Chairman, Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority; Chairman, ProGrid Ventures Inc., Sarnia, ON.

Dr. Richard Taylor - Contributor to the Committee - Nobel Laureate (Nobel Prize in Physics 1990), and Professor Emeritus, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

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