

## CSIRO Staff Association

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A section of the Community and Public Sector Union



Committee Secretary  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
*Submitted by email to [pwc@aph.gov.au](mailto:pwc@aph.gov.au)*

20 September 2019

### **Submission into the Inquiry into the CSIRO Sydney Consolidation Project**

Dear Committee,

The CSIRO Staff Association is a section of the Community and Public Sector Union which represents CSIRO staff, including scientists, engineers, technical, managerial, support and administrative staff. The Staff Association supports CSIRO's overall objective to consolidate its Sydney sites but draws to the attention of the Committee the following matters of concern to staff.

#### Alternative option for relocation of CSIRO Astronomy and Space Science

CSIRO Astronomy and Space Science (CASS) has its headquarters at the Marsfield site, with nearly 100 staff. The preferred option for CASS staff is not relocation to CSIRO's Lindfield site as proposed in CSIRO's submission to the Committee. CSIRO Staff Association representatives have worked with CASS management in recent months to propose a viable and preferred alternative option: relocation to Macquarie University's campus at North Ryde, which is currently under consideration.

This option is preferred as it would enable CSIRO to co-locate its astronomy and space science capabilities with similar capabilities at Macquarie University. This would create a collaboration hub between CSIRO and Macquarie University, enable the sharing of facilities and scientific instrumentation as well as supporting connections with students, affiliates and astronomy communities.

In addition, the Macquarie University build would be a 'clean slate' whereas Lindfield requires retrofitting for astronomy and space science capabilities. It is also a more attractive option for current staff in CASS in terms of fit for purpose accommodation, laboratories and better access by public transport, relative to the Lindfield site. The Staff Association provides at *Annexure A* correspondence between Staff Association CASS delegate Aaron Chippendale and CSIRO management, which details the concerns of staff and the expected benefits of the alternative option.

**We request that the Committee consider this alternative option for CSIRO's CASS capabilities and staff in Sydney.**

#### Consolidation project should provide for expansion of capabilities and staffing levels

Notably, CSIRO's submission omits objectives for the project that would provide for expansion of capabilities or staffing levels. In the Staff Association's view, this is a significant flaw of the project as it assumes (and practically locks in) that there will be little expansion of CSIRO's overall scientific capabilities or staffing levels in Sydney for decades to come.

CSIRO's overall staffing headcount is steadily increasing but it is still about a thousand staff less than pre-2014 staffing levels. Clearly there is capacity to grow; the challenges of our economy, environment and society increasingly require practical scientific solutions that CSIRO is best placed to provide. CSIRO's current strategy is engaging the community and partners in new areas of R&D, so it is likely (and we hope) that CSIRO's capabilities will expand, necessitating the provision of additional accommodation and laboratories.

The Sydney Consolidation project already proposes significant compromises, including the loss of existing laboratory space for manufacturing research and the departure of start-up and tech companies from current tenanted space at Lindfield. Both of these consequences are undesirable and can be averted by providing more space, either at Lindfield or through the enactment of the option to relocate CASS staff to Macquarie University as described.

**The Staff Association requests that the Committee require CSIRO management to have in place plans for potential expansion of scientific capabilities and staffing levels as part of the project e.g. if staffing levels increased by up to 20% (pre-2014 levels) in the next decade.**

We submit it is more efficient to plan for accommodation and facilities that provide for expansion now, rather than to seek additional funds of Government a relatively short time later.

#### Limit open plan accommodation

CSIRO's Accommodation Principles are guided by the Commonwealth Property Guidelines. The Staff Association has repeatedly made representations to CSIRO management and to this Committee on previous CSIRO works projects regarding the loss of productivity and staff wellbeing arising from open plan accommodation.

The Staff Association has regularly provided CSIRO management with peer-reviewed literature demonstrating that open plan accommodation reduces face-to-face interactions and collaboration; as well as increasing distraction, diminishing the opportunity for deep thought and the ability to write scientific publications. Most concerningly, the evidence is now in, with CSIRO's scientific output (as measured by publications per FTE) declining since the expansion of open plan accommodation at our largest sites at Black Mountain and Clayton.

In terms of wellbeing and morale, CSIRO's submission to the Committee is misleading. Staff do not believe that the project will fulfil one of its stated objectives to 'improve staff morale by providing more modern and attractive research facilities'. CSIRO's own analyses and staff surveys confirm wellbeing as a major concern with 1 in 8 staff in the organisation at high risk. The proliferation of open plan accommodation, in combination with job cuts, attacks on science and unsustainable workloads, has exacerbated morale problems.

The Staff Association's position is clear and consistent. Open plan accommodation for many staff in CSIRO workplaces is counterproductive to productivity and wellbeing in our scientific organisation. Any financial gains made today by reducing accommodation space will be considerably less than the ongoing loss of revenue from diminished productivity and staff wellbeing for years to come.

Further, the typical open plan accommodation proposed at Lindfield (refer to Annexure G3 of CSIRO's submission) appears to be little more than a demolition of office walls, with a reduction of workstation and storage areas. In fact, it creates an additional internal corridor (the main external corridor to the existing office

spaces will be retained) which would be unused wasted space. The Staff Association submits that a preferable option is to retain the existing office walls (which also saves demolition costs) and accommodate two staff (instead of one) in each existing office.

**In summary, the Staff Association requests that the Committee and CSIRO management reconsider what 'fit for purpose' genuinely means for CSIRO and its staff. Based on the evidence, it should result in very limited open plan accommodation in order to boost collaboration, productivity and staff wellbeing at work.**

#### Assess feasibility of on-site childcare

CSIRO's submission to the Committee states that in all circumstances, there is enough commercially available childcare in proximity to each site/location to satisfy the demand for childcare services from staff. Currently CSIRO management provides on-site childcare at North Ryde as part of a joint commitment to staff through the CSIRO Enterprise Agreement. This project proposes to abolish the provision of on-site childcare at all Sydney sites, even though the size of the new Lindfield site (in terms of staffing numbers) is proposed to be more than double the size of the existing North Ryde site. With the prospect of no on-site childcare at any of CSIRO's Sydney sites, staff will lose close access to childcare as well as the option of salary packaging.

**The Staff Association requests that CSIRO management conduct and provide the Committee with an independent feasibility study into the provision of on-site childcare at Lindfield, including assessment of the benefits in attracting and retaining staff in Sydney.**

#### Better public transport

The Lindfield site is serviced by public transport by the 565 bus service to Chatswood, Lindfield and Macquarie Park train stations. The Staff Association has investigated the frequency of this bus service and has found that it is inadequate to meet the projected demand of the increased Lindfield site population particularly during the morning peak period.

The service to/from Macquarie Park is completely inadequate, with only two services available to get staff to work before 10am. The service to/from Chatswood is only slightly better, with buses leaving Chatswood in the morning at 7.37, 8.00 and then 10.15am. The service to/from Lindfield is the 'best' of the three options, with buses leaving Lindfield approximately every 30min until 8.30am, but then only every hour.

The project proposes that CSIRO staffing headcount at the Lindfield site will grow from 57 to 465 (an increase of 720%). Yet there are no changes proposed to public transport to accommodate this growth, in a predominantly residential area. The Staff Association believes that many staff will be forced to drive to the Lindfield site, which is not only deleterious to the environment but adds significantly to traffic bottlenecks, particularly around peak times.

**We request that CSIRO management work towards the provision of additional public transport, not just to support CSIRO staff, but for the amenity of the local community.**

#### Improve consultation

Whilst CSIRO's submission (dated 31 July 2019) reports on issues raised by staff, including issues that have been previously raised by the Staff Association, CSIRO's submission provides limited details on their proposed responses or actions to address issues of concern as required by the Committee's procedure manual. Consultation is particularly important, as issues detailed in the Staff Association's submission have been raised by staff for many months, and in writing through the correspondence listed at Annexure A (dated 7

December 2018). It is of significant value to all CSIRO staff, not just staff within particular CSIRO Business Units, that they are involved in the consultation process and provided with a clear opportunity to have their concerns heard and addressed.

**The Staff Association requests that the Committee require CSIRO management to provide further detail on their proposed responses and actions to address the issues of staff, including those in the Staff Association's submission and improve consultation processes to ensure all affected employees are provided with a clear opportunity to raise concerns, prior to proceeding with the project.**

Reinstatement of accommodation for visitors to CASS in Sydney

CSIRO's Astronomy and Space Science (CASS) headquarters at the Marsfield site includes lodge accommodation for the national and international astronomy communities. The site maintains a 24-hour centre for operating Australia's major telescopes and regularly hosts students and visitors.

There is no provision for lodge accommodation at the Lindfield site or as part of the project. CSIRO management advised staff that this component was not part of the scope of the project. The abolition of lodge accommodation for telescope users will diminish collaboration and safe 24-hour access to CASS facilities on site.

**The Staff Association requests that the Committee require CSIRO management to have plans to facilitate accommodation for visitors to CASS at Lindfield or at Macquarie University (as the alternative location for CASS).**

Yours sincerely,

Sam Popovski  
Secretary

## Annexure A

Aaron Chippendale  
Staff Association Delegate  
CSIRO Marsfield  
PO Box 76  
Epping NSW 1710

7 December 2018

Tony Cuzzillo  
Project Director  
CSIRO Sydney Consolidation Project  
GPO Box 1700  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr. Cuzzillo,

I write to you on behalf of 85 Marsfield staff as their CSIRO Staff Association (union) delegate. We believe that CSIRO could do better than the standing proposal to consolidate Sydney CASS staff at Lindfield. I met with 35 Marsfield staff on 4 December and have solicited input site wide. CASS staff at Marsfield, of whom 49 including myself are Staff Association members, were most vocal in this process.

While it is necessary to reduce recurring costs, consolidation must maintain or preferably boost CSIRO's capacity to deliver world leading innovation with impact. We are most concerned by:

- the risk of the planned consolidation to CASS staff productivity;
- the suitability of consolidation at Lindfield to CSIRO's purpose; and
- the large number of arbitrary constraints on the process that are limiting outcomes and elevating risks.

Staff would like the risks to their productivity to be appropriately assessed, costed and reported. We were surprised to learn that 27% of Marsfield respondents to the transport survey said that they will consider resignation upon relocation. Unfortunately, we are so resource limited that it would only take the loss of one critical person in most teams within CASS Engineering and Operations programs to significantly compromise our ability to operate Australia's major radio telescopes, keep them world class, and continue exporting our state-of-the-art technology worldwide. It is already difficult to replace people at the skill level of our existing staff given the pay we can offer. Moving to a less accessible site in a more expensive part of Sydney will not help. This is before considering the challenges for remaining staff to deliver on work that requires focus, deep thought and collaboration in an open-plan environment that may reduce face-to-face interaction by 70%<sup>1</sup> and increase distraction. We challenge CSIRO to apply the best available workspace research to maximise staff productivity per square meter rather than blindly cut floor area.

Staff would like CSIRO to pursue consolidation solutions that are better suited to our purpose. CASS members of the CSIRO Staff Association strongly support our business unit's pursuit of Macquarie University as an alternative site. If CASS staff must leave Marsfield, we strongly prefer moving to Macquarie University where we see incomparably more opportunities for an effective and collaborative workplace. Built from scratch to our purpose, this workplace could be optimised for our provision of instruments and research services to the nation's astronomy and space

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1 E. S. Bernstein and S. Turban, "The impact of the 'open' workspace on human collaboration," *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B*, vol. 373, no. 1753, p. 20170239, Aug. 2018.

communities. We would be ideally co-located with a growing concentration of astronomers and instrumentation specialists formed by the recent transition of AAO's research and instrumentation capability to Macquarie University. Further, the university setting would boost student engagement and commend the CASS/CSIRO brand to the next generation of researchers.

CASS has a unique role of designing, building and operating major telescopes as a national research facility. This requires intensive interaction with the national and international astronomy communities. We currently maintain a 24 hr telescope operation centre, accommodation for telescope users and collaborators, and host numerous students on the Marsfield site that is easily accessible via public transport. Our strong customer support and collaborative intensity is built on our accessibility. We could grow this further at a site like Macquarie. Lindfield is clearly less accessible. There are limited transport options for the daily commute of staff, let alone the safe coming and going of students and telescope users at all hours. The Lindfield site will be near full after consolidation, and this will limit opportunities for CASS to grow. This is bad timing as we prepare to construct, host, and operate the world's largest radio telescope (SKA), and as we seek new opportunities and funding in the space and satellite arenas.

Staff ask you to appropriately question constraints on the consolidation project that limit the pursuit of better solutions. We could make alternative sites work better or make Lindfield work better for CASS and CSIRO by relaxing just one of the many constraints including:

- the area per person;
- that the chosen site should be Lindfield;
- that the layout be open-plan;
- that we must retrofit a building that was optimised for a purpose that is not ours (heavy standards laboratory); and
- that Lindfield be so full after consolidation that it impedes our growth potential.

CASS staff also faced the inequity of hearing, in your meeting with us on 26 November, that Data61 must maintain a presence at ATP because that location is key for what they do. CASS' work is no less unique and deserves serious consideration of alternatives that better suit our own purpose such as:

1. in-place consolidation after a partial sale of Marsfield;
2. built-to-purpose accommodation in a collaborative astronomy hub at Macquarie; or
3. another university or accessible technology hub like Norwest or ATP.

I am expressing our concerns to Dave Williams, Douglas Bock, Larry Marshall and the CSIRO executive team and will encourage the Staff Association to make a submission to the Public Works Committee. I request that you acknowledge receipt and look forward to your constructive response.

Please contact me if I can further assist, especially in dialog between the project and Marsfield staff.

Yours Sincerely,

CSIRO Staff Association  
Marsfield Delegates

CC: Sam Popovski (CSIRO Staff Association Secretary)  
CC: Marsfield members of the CSIRO Staff Association