

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
 Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio
 2015-16 Additional Budget Estimates
 11 February 2016

AGENCY: CSIRO

TOPIC: Redundancies in the optical coatings, metrology and polishing areas

REFERENCE: Written question – Senator Carr

QUESTION No.: AI-147

In making redundancies in the optical coatings, metrology and polishing areas, what steps did CSIRO take to ensure that these capabilities would be maintained within the Australian research community?

ANSWER

CSIRO explored numerous options as detailed below:

Option	Outcome	Steps taken
1. Move capability to a university	Explored but not viable. Three universities with complementary capability and interest have all declined to take this option further.	Several meetings were held with representatives of these universities to understand what the Business case might look like for each University looking at capability, the finances and external revenue pipeline.
2. Start-up company run by staff.	Explored not viable The staff decided that they did not wish to pursue this.	Several CSIRO officers considered the opportunity to establish a start up company. A former CSIRO staff member who has set up their own company in a similar space came to talk to the staff involved. The redeployment period for the team was extended several months to accommodate these possibilities.
3. Start-up run by a third party	Explored not viable.	An entrepreneur considered if this was a viable start-up which they could run. Business case was developed by third party, involving CSIRO investment.

		The business case was discussed internally but was not endorsed by CSIRO.
4. Joint venture with one of more university to create a new node of Australian National Fabrication Facility (ANFF)	Plan for remaining infrastructure/capability.	In partnership with one or more university, the remaining equipment may still be transferred to ANFF now that NCRIS funding is available over the next 10 years. This option remains under discussion.
5. Transfer to CSIRO Facilities or Services	Reviewed but not viable.	Reviewed internally by CSIRO. Not endorsed as financially unsustainable.
6. Capability move to an existing business	Explored but not viable.	A relevant private business was consulted on this option; they considered taking on the optics capability but could not afford the costs needed to maintain the capability and staff in the current economic environment.
7. Request advice from independent optics expert		CSIRO was advised that Stanford University had closed many of their equivalent labs as it is impossible to maintain the capability without significant government investment.
8. Grow external revenue by increasing marketing and using direct contacts with leaders in the field	Explored but not viable	CSIRO CEO wrote to 18 international colleagues introducing the CSIRO Optics capability. Eight replied and none led to an order. CSIRO requested LIGO to provide a letter of intent but they were unable to provide such a letter as there was no intent for future work at that time. CSIRO took the opportunity to speak to a number of Australian optical researchers at the 2014 AIP Congress Canberra, seeking their support to order optical components from CSIRO,

		such as mirrors for high power lasers. Some interest but no work orders received.
9. Divert other CSIRO funding	Explored but not viable.	<p>CSIRO offered an extra \$250k in provisional funding to cover the immediate funding shortfall.</p> <p>However the pipeline of expenditure was not covered by the additional available funds.</p>