

Dear KCA member,

As Chair of Knowledge Commercialisation Australasia (KCA), I wanted to let you know about some of the exciting events we will be running this year. I also wanted to emphasise how critical you are to the success of the organisation – as an organisation we exist to serve our members – to give voice to your concerns and ideas and of course to provide you with opportunities for training and networking in these challenging times.

It is an understatement to say 2020 was an eventful year. 2021 promises to bring us both challenges and opportunities. With COVID-19 vaccines being rolled out worldwide, national and state borders still being in a state of flux, and the economy slowly recovering, the rate of change in government, industries and research organisations is accelerating. KCA and our technology transfer professionals (TTPs) across Australia and New Zealand, must assist our organisations to move quickly and make the most of the many opportunities these challenging times present.

The KCA board will, COVID-19 allowing, run our face-to-face Annual Conference on the Gold Coast from September 9-10. We are optimistic travel restrictions will have eased by this time. The conference committee is well underway with planning for speakers and events. Please pencil in the dates to attend the conference. After a two-year absence, this event will provide a great opportunity for networking and learning. We will reveal the winners for the KCA Awards for the best commercialisation deals and partnerships.

Following on from the very successful **Survey of Commercialisation Outcomes from Public Research** (SCOPR) last year, we will soon be launching SCOPR 2021. This survey will cover commercialisation data from the 2020 calendar year. The SCOPR 2020 report was widely valued by both our members and policy makers in Federal Government Departments and University Associations. The survey is overseen by the SCOPR committee chaired by one of your directors John Grace AO. The SCOPR committee is currently in the planning stage, so now is a great time to let us know if you had any feedback or suggestions to make SCOPR even better this year. We look forward to your ongoing support for SCOPR 2021 and announcing the results live at the KCA Annual Conference.

The announcement of a \$5.8m scoping study for the **University Research Commercialisation Scheme** (URCS) in the 2020-2021 budget was a significant policy event for the research commercialisation sector in Australia¹. KCA has engaged heavily with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment on this project and has provided advice and feedback to several activities within URCS. We continue to advocate for proof-of-concept funding (through establishment of a pre-seed fund) to accelerate commercialisation outcomes from university research, along with a dedicated third stream of funding to support commercialisation and knowledge transfer activities within universities.

On Friday, the Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment released the **University Research Commercialisation consultation paper**. The paper calls for submissions on the development of an Australian university research commercialisation model, plus possible mechanisms to incentivise business-university partnership. KCA encourages all members to engage in this discussion, both as organisations and through their membership of KCA. We are currently seeking feedback from our members on this consultation paper². Please send any comments through to our KCA Secretariat

¹ See <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/better-commercialising-university-research>

² See <https://www.dese.gov.au/urc>

(admin@techtransfer.org.au) by **Friday 26 March** for review and inclusion. We are also happy to set up one-on-one meetings with anyone who would like to become more involved in this process.

From KCA's perspective, access to proof-of-concept funding remains a significant barrier to the effective commercialisation of intellectual property developed within universities and other publicly funded research organisations. The creation of a National Proof-of Concept Scheme, which is light touch and locally administered, would create considerable, quantifiable benefit to the national innovation landscape. Our colleagues in New Zealand have an excellent example of such a scheme in their Pre-Seed Accelerator Fund (PSAF)³. This government funded initiative devolves funding decisions to local approved commercialisation entities. These entities can approve the allocation of PSAF funds to projects, provided matched funding provided by the institutions. These can be individual commercialisation offices, or networks to gain scale. This program has been successfully run since 2003 and has delivered both the flexibility required for individual opportunities as well as accountability through approved investment processes. The 2020 KiwiNet Annual PreSeed Report demonstrated that by investing in proof-of-concept projects, they had created a return to New Zealand over eight-times greater than PreSeed invested⁴.

Improving capability and increasing capacity of university commercialisation offices can be achieved through dedicated third-stream funding is a key focus for KCA this year. Such funding would address the skills gaps across the innovation ecosystem, and provide appropriate resourcing for commercialisation offices, benchmarked to international standards. The UK addressed this issue with the introduction of bipartisan supported third-stream funding in their Higher Education Innovation Fund⁵. This fund has been in place for more than a decade and has facilitated the development of a vibrant knowledge exchange sector in UK Higher Education Institutions. It has also led to the recent development of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)⁶ and the ongoing development of the Knowledge Exchange Concordat. New Zealand have funded Commercialisation Partner Networks⁷, alongside their PSAF to ensure that appropriate skills are linked with funding. An Australian third-stream funding program for our universities would help to address these capacity and capability issues by developing a critical mass of well-trained commercialisation professionals with the skills necessary to translate the high-quality basic research in the Australian research system.

KCA is a not for profit, peak body leading best practice in industry engagement, technology transfer and entrepreneurship for research organisations since 1978. KCA is a founding member of the global Alliance of Technology Transfer Professionals. Much like the world around us, our sector is changing rapidly and profoundly. KCA is currently a 700+ strong community of collaborators, advisors, and mentors, led by my passionate and dedicated colleagues on our Board.

KCA has an important role in promoting and informing the success stories of the commercialisation of publicly funded research. We welcome any ideas you may have to improve our ability to successfully convey these messages. Through innovation and your efforts, we will drive the creation of new industries and the improvement of existing businesses, and in so doing we will improve our lives and protect our planet.

³ See <http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/science-innovation/investment-funding/current-funding/pre-seed-accelerator-fund>

⁴ See <https://kiwinet.org.nz/About/CorporatePublications>

⁵ See <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/the-higher-education-innovation-fund-heif/>

⁶ See <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/knowledge-exchange-framework/>

⁷ See <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/science-and-technology/science-and-innovation/funding-information-and-opportunities/investment-funds/commercialisation-partner-network/>

If you have any comments, ideas, suggestions, or complaints, please send them through to our KCA Secretariat (admin@techtransfer.org.au) so we can continue to improve our organisation. We look forward to working with you to build a stronger commercialisation ecosystem in 2021.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Erin Rayment, PhD GAICD RTTP

Chair, Knowledge Commercialisation Australasia