



Australian Earth Sciences Convention, 20-24 July, Perth

Monday 21 July 2008

“Substantially more funding” needed for critical geoscience research, new President warns governments

Australia’s governments must urgently provide “substantially more funding” for critical post-graduate geoscience research in areas like clean and reliable baseload energy, salinity management, climate change, geo-hazards, and groundwater exploration and contamination, or face the future environmental and economic consequences of the current funding shortfall, the new President of the Geological Society of Australia (GSA) has warned.

Professor Peter Cawood – who takes up his position as GSA President today – has also called on governments, industry, universities and other stakeholders to urgently develop a National Geoscience Research Strategy to ensure Australia’s post-graduate research capacity is not lost during resources booms like the one that is currently underway in Australia, and to ensure that commercially-focused geoscience research can immediately benefit other areas of geoscience research.

Professor Cawood made his comments as this week’s Australian Earth Sciences Convention gets underway in Perth. Up to 1000 geoscience experts from across the globe are attending the mega-conference to hear and discuss the latest research on major environmental, geo-hazard, planetary science and resource sector issues as well as many other critical issues affecting life on Earth.

“Much more research urgently needs to be undertaken into critical geoscientific areas such as salinity management, groundwater exploration and contamination management, the development of clean and reliable baseload energy generation, climate change, geo-hazards and the many other areas of geoscience research that are absolutely crucial to the future wellbeing of all Australians, but many of our universities are continuing to suffer from enormous funding squeezes in being able to achieve this” Professor Cawood said.

“At the same time, the current resources boom has seen many geoscience graduates moving straight into full-time work with resources companies the day they walk out their university’s front door. While the opportunities presented by the boom are a great opportunity for these graduates – and provide significant benefits to Australia’s economic health – our universities simply can’t entice sufficient numbers of graduates to stay on and undertake the critical ‘big issues’ research that will benefit Australia over the next fifty years.

“In short, while our universities are currently supplying graduates for the resources sector to meet its immediate needs, the long-term requirements of the sector and the nation will best be served if we can simultaneously be training more post-graduate students and benefiting from the research they undertake.

“Governments, national geoscience organisations, universities, industry and other stakeholders need to jointly develop a comprehensive, overarching National Geoscience Research Strategy to ensure the immediate needs of the resources sector are met as well as Australia’s wider need for critical geoscience research.

“Such a strategy should include significantly more funding from the federal and state governments for more post-graduate scholarships and the development of flexible options where more of our best and brightest graduates can be employed by the resource companies while also undertaking the post-graduate research that is of critical importance to Australia’s future.

“The strategy should also establish clear pathways so that commercially-focused geoscience research can be quickly utilised in other critical areas. For example, the Australian Earth Sciences Convention will hear this week how oil exploration techniques are also very useful in finding much-needed groundwater. This type of research needs to be available in one central point so all geoscience sectors can benefit from it.

“The resource sector and some of Australia’s governments continue to be important contributors to geoscience research funding in Australia. The time is now ripe for all of our governments to come behind this research effort, to ensure a much stronger future for geoscience research in Australia over the next fifty years and a brighter future for Australia itself.”

Professor Cawood also thanked his predecessor as GSA President, Professor Andy Gleadow, for the substantial contribution he has made to the work of the GSA during his time as President.

“Under Professor Gleadow, the GSA has become a truly national organisation and a crucial body in bringing together the diverse elements of the geoscience community in Australia, including those in industry, academia and government. We thank Professor Gleadow for the excellent work he has undertaken for the organisation during his term as President.”

Available for comment: Professor Peter Cawood

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What: 2008 Australian Earth Sciences Convention

When: Sunday 20 - Thursday 24 July 2008 (main program commences on Monday 21 July)

Where: Perth Convention & Exhibition Centre, Perth

Find the full Convention program at www.iceaustralia.com/aesc2008. Media can also access suggested speaker and topic lists (organised into subject headings and state-specific headings), as well as other background material, **on the Media page of the website.**