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Govt called on to form IP strategy

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A group of intellectual property professionals wants the Government to create a national intellectual property (IP) strategy to ensure the scientific community can contribute more to commercial innovation.

Licensing Executives Society of Australia and New Zealand trustee Frik de Beer says a strategy focused on IP management will advance the commercialisation of New Zealand science on a local and international scale.

With robust planning for technology transfer, New Zealand will be able to develop skills and a knowledge base to manage, protect and optimise national technology, he says.

In announcing the \$321 million allocated for research and science in the 2010 Budget, Prime Minister John Key shifted the focus of research and development onto business R&D.

"Our goal is for firms to be making better use of R&D to take greater advantage of market opportunities.

"New Zealand has very high-quality research institutions – both public and private – which are carrying out cutting-edge science. But we have some way to go when it comes to turning scientific knowledge and insights into business growth," Key said.

Of the money allocated, \$225m was in new funding and \$96m redirected from elsewhere. The new measures include an R&D grant for technology development for medium-to-larger sized firms that can show their activities will result in benefits to the country. The Govern-

ment will contribute 20 per cent of the firm's expected R&D spend for up to three years.

Another measure included \$20m over four years into technology transfer vouchers, which are targeted at firms with little in-house R&D capability. They can apply for a voucher – typically worth between \$100,000 and \$200,000 to use in completing a project with a public research organisation.

Another \$24.7m goes to helping capture the commercial value of research done in public research organisations.

De Beer says the Government's announcement will "push science back up the political agenda, with funding increases to Crown Research Institutes".

The eight CRIs in New Zealand, which employ about 4400, generated \$675m in the fiscal year 2008-09, accounting for a quarter of the country's total research effort.

A February report of the CRI Taskforce says CRIs can and should be able to contribute more if their funding, ownership and governance arrangements are fine tuned.

"The report assumes that with reform and redistribution of funding, CRIs will be better positioned to deliver economic value and innovation outcomes to the state.

"But nothing was said about intellectual property, which is the main and most important output of science," de Beer says.

Among the skills base he suggests are the identification, documentation, evaluation, protection and optimum use of high-value technology.

"Minimising trade secret loss by improving protection, and outward licensing on more competitive terms, are both areas where New Zealand's innovation outcomes can be improved," de Beer says.

He says a national IP strategy would bridge the gap between the outcomes of CRIs and delivering strong economic value.



Frik de Beer