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MUCH FOR REGIONAL AUSTRALIA AND ITS UNIVERSITIES IN GOVERNMENT'S INNOVATION STATEMENT

The Government's National Innovation & Science Agenda (NISA), jointly released by the Prime Minister, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, and the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, the Hon Christopher Pyne MP, is a comprehensive package which provides a strong basis for innovation in regional Australia, as well as the nation as a whole.

The Chair of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Professor Jan Thomas, said that regional universities were keen to work closely with industry and the Government to make the most of the opportunities provided by the package.

"NISA lays a robust framework for innovation. The programs are ongoing, which gives some certainty for future funding, including for research infrastructure. NISA provides incentives to further university-business engagement, and incentives for business to innovate and develop an entrepreneurial culture, including encouraging start-ups. Small to medium enterprises in the regions will benefit from the package. Science is encouraged through new and expanded initiatives," Professor Thomas said.

"RUN will enthusiastically collaborate with regional industries in areas of relevance to the new Incubator Support Program, such as agricultural science, one of the areas in which our universities excelled in the 2015 Excellence in Research for Australia assessment.

"We are also well placed to contribute to the Global Innovation Strategy, which will provide seed funding for collaborative science workshops with regional economies on shared challenges, such as food and biosecurity.

"Through the NISA statement, the Government has committed to implementing the Watt Review of Research Funding and Policy, including through the restructuring of the research block grants with additional funding for engagement and transition arrangements. We welcome the Government's statement that this will include 'further funding for regional universities', which will assist us in addressing any unintended consequences for our universities arising from the changes to the research block grants.

"We are pleased that the new Innovation Connections fund will include matched grants to support graduate and postgraduate researchers being placed in business. We hope that this initiative will be widely taken up in regional Australia.

"CSIRO's new Innovation Fund will provide co-investment in new spin-off and start-up companies, products and services created by research institutions including universities – we hope that regional universities will be able to collaborate with CSIRO on this.

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"Initiatives to promote science to school students and communities will benefit regional Australia," Professor Thomas said.

"The Government is to be congratulated on this package."

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