



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **Verity Firth**

**Minister for Women  
Minister for Science and Medical Research  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water**

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EMBARGOED until 5am on Thursday, 13 December 2007

### **NSW GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES MAJOR PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO NANOTECH**

As part of its continuing efforts to better understand the potential risks and benefits associated with nanotechnology, the NSW Government has initiated a parliamentary inquiry into this relatively new field of scientific endeavour – becoming the first state or territory to do so.

Nanotechnology is the manipulation of matter at the atomic or molecular level – lengths equivalent to 1/100,000<sup>th</sup> the diameter of a human hair.

Minister for Science and Medical Research Verity Firth said nanotechnology has the very real potential to transform many sectors of the NSW economy, leading to new products, new businesses, new jobs and even new industries.

“Nanotechnology offers the promise of breakthroughs that will revolutionise the way we detect and treat disease; monitor and protect the environment; and produce and store energy,” said Ms Firth.

“But before the technology’s full potential can be released, safety and ethical concerns need to be assessed by governments.”

Some groups have already raised anxieties about the technology’s possible negative implications for human health and the natural environment.

“That’s why I’ve written to the Legislative Council’s Standing Committee for State Development asking it to investigate the potential environmental, health, safety, legal and ethical implications or uncertainties that may arise from the development and use of nano-material and products,” said Ms Firth.

“As the use of man-made nano-materials become more common, we want to make sure they will not have unexpected consequences for people or the environment.

“The inquiry will seek to reassure the community as well as make sure the Government’s regulatory arrangements are both adequate and appropriate.

“Ultimately we want a balanced and informed approach to nanotechnology.”

Nanotechnology is already being used in a range of everyday products including electronics, computer displays, optical fibres, pharmaceuticals, prosthetics, sunscreens, self-cleaning windows, paints, varnishes and stain-resistant clothing.

“While the NSW Government is already cooperating with the Commonwealth Government on the development of a National Nanotechnology Strategy, the inquiry I’m announcing today will help ensure our State is well positioned to benefit in a way that is safe, responsible and ethical,” said Ms Firth.

“What’s more, a number of national and international organisations are also working to define protocols and guidelines for the use of nanotechnology, including Standards Australia, NanoSafe, the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).”

Ms Firth said the NSW Government is committed to promoting innovation through the provision a clearly defined regulatory framework.

“As well as investigating the potential benefits and risks of nanotechnology, the parliamentary inquiry will be looking at the skills, education and research needed to ensure that NSW remains a responsible leader in this field,” said Ms Firth.

The NSW Government has recently provided \$4 million for nanotechnology R&D.

The parliamentary inquiry’s final report is due by the end of October next year.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE INQUIRY INTO NANOTECHNOLOGY IN NSW...**

##### **To examine and report on:**

- Current and future applications of nanotechnology in the NSW community and industry;
- The health, safety and environmental risks and benefits;
- Appropriateness of the current regulatory frameworks in operation nationally and in NSW for management of nanomaterials over their lifecycle;
- Education and skills development related to nanotechnology;
- Adequacy of the National Nanotechnology Strategy in the NSW context;
- Community understanding of nanotechnology, and possible public awareness and engagement options.

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## NANOTECHNOLOGY IN NSW...

- The **NSW Innovation Statement** specifically identifies manufacturing and medical research as critical to the NSW economy. Emerging platform technologies, such as nanotechnology, are enabling those sectors to develop innovative products and processes.
- Nanotechnology is a key driver of innovation in NSW's manufacturing, biotechnology, and medical device industries.
- Companies that are adopting and applying the new technologies include:
  - CAP-XX develops high-power, high-energy storage devices to make smaller, thinner and longer-running products such as mobile phones, PDAs, medical devices etc;
  - Nanotec Pty Ltd produces wood and glass sealants;
  - Nanovations develops coatings with applications in the building, construction and marine industries;
  - Sirtex is developing liver cancer treatments using novel small particle technology;
  - Global companies with significant investments in NSW, such as Canon and Fujitsu, also utilise nanotechnologies in their research and manufacturing processes.
- NSW is also home to several institutions specialising in cutting-edge nanotechnology research:
  - Macquarie University's Department of Physics is home to two nanotechnology research facilities focused on optical and laser processes;
  - The new Advanced Materials Centre at the University of Wollongong will host a base for electro-materials research, incorporating expertise from the University of Newcastle's Centre for Organic Electronics;
  - The University of Western Sydney, together with UNSW, form a research node for the Centre for Excellence in Functional Nanomaterials;
  - The University of Western Sydney (UWS) Nanotechnology Project transfers opportunities in nanotechnology to the manufacturing industries of the Campbelltown/Camden region;
  - The University of Sydney is the lead institution in the Australian Microscopy and Microanalysis research facility – a lead national facility for the characterisation of nanoparticles and nanomaterials.