



# MEDIA STATEMENT

THE HON VERITY FIRTH MP

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

23 July 2008

## SYDNEY IN RACE TO DEVELOP FIRST BIONIC EYE

NSW will be a leading player in the international race to commercialise a functional bionic eye, with a world-class Centre for Implantable Bionics to be established at the University of New South Wales in Sydney.

Minister for Science and Medical Research Verity Firth and UNSW Vice-Chancellor Professor Fred Hilmer announced the new Centre today, to be set up in partnership between the NSW Government, the University and philanthropic supporters.

"Bionics brings together biology and engineering to create electronic devices that can either replace or support malfunctioning body parts in patients," Ms Firth said.

"It has huge potential to make a difference to people's lives, as witnessed by the global success of the Cochlear bionic hearing implant for the profoundly deaf.

"The UNSW-based Centre for Implantable Bionics will be a world class research centre working to create bionic implants with potential in a range of medical areas.

"This is about investing in not only a healthier community but a more innovative economy."

Research efforts will include the commercialisation of a bionic eye, refined bionic hearing devices and artificial heart technologies, and development of electronic stimulation technology which could restore movement to the limbs of people who have suffered paralysis.

A new leading research chair, the Paul M Trainor Chair in Biomedical Engineering, will be affiliated with the Centre and an international search is currently under way for the inaugural holder of the position.

UNSW Vice-Chancellor Professor Fred Hilmer welcomed the NSW Government's \$200,000 contribution to help establish the Centre for Implantable Bionics.

"This new Centre represents an important collaboration between government, the research community, industry and philanthropic donors and underscores the importance of developing solutions to debilitating impairments," Professor Hilmer said.

"It has the potential to deliver vastly improved quality of life to sufferers of those impairments around Australia and the world."

One of the Centre's first projects will be a collaboration with leaders in the biomedical industry on the commercialisation of a bionic eye.

UNSW's Advanced Vision Prosthesis Group has been working on a bionic eye since 1997, and has produced over 70 peer-reviewed scientific publications and filed multiple patents.

Ms Firth noted that UNSW researchers have said a working bionic eye could be an Australian world-first and that a functional bionic eye was identified as a key health goal for Australia at the 2020 Summit held in Canberra in April.

The Centre will be up and running by next year.

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