

Field Robotics Pioneer Hugh Durrant-Whyte named as NICTA CEO

NICTA, Australias Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Research Centre of Excellence, is pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Professor Durrant-Whyte currently leads the Australian Centre for Field Robotics (ACFR) at the University of Sydney.

"We are delighted that Professor Durrant-Whyte has agreed to join NICTA as its CEO," said NICTA Chairman Neville Stevens, AO. "We are confident he will steer NICTA to deliver the next generation of ICT research and commercial breakthroughs and build the companys capacity and reputation for research excellence and successful commercialisation."

Mr Stevens also paid tribute to outgoing CEO, David Skellern. "Dr Skellern has put NICTA on the map both nationally and internationally. He inherited a fledging organisation of promise and transformed it into an internationally respected research and development group able to tackle major problems facing Australia. He leaves a great legacy."

Professor Durrant-Whyte brings considerable research and commercial expertise to his new role. He has established a major ARC Centre of Excellence with strong links to industry. In addition he has spun out a number of companies, most recently Marathon Robotics, which developed free-ranging robots protected by armour plating to train marksmen. The company recently secured a \$57 million contract with the US Navy. He has also been involved in numerous projects across Australian industry. These include the automation of the Port of Brisbane, the development of underwater robots off the WA coastline, improving food security with flying weed-spraying drones and large-scale mining automation. In September, he was awarded the prestigious NSW Scientist of the Year for 2010.

"The opportunity to lead a young, dynamic organisation like NICTA is a great challenge," said Professor Durrant-Whyte. "Getting use-inspired ICT research out the door and into the market is one of NICTAs most important tasks, as it generates wealth for Australia. It is an exciting time for ICT research in Australia with the advent of the National Broadband Network and I am confident that NICTA can play an important role in finding solutions to some of the pressing challenges we face in sectors such as healthcare, energy, transport and logistics."

Professor Durrant-Whyte will start as NICTA CEO in mid December and there would be a handover period before the outgoing CEO Dr David Skellern retires in early 2011. His appointment follows a competitive international search, assisted by Russell Reynolds and Associates, which attracted many highly qualified candidates.

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Stephen Conroy, said: "Professor Durrant-Whyte is an inspiring individual who has managed to bridge the gap between academia and industry. Over the past ten years, he has attracted over \$50 million in industry funding and been responsible for developing a robotics group which is arguably the most successful in the world."

Senator Conroy acknowledged the work of Dr Skellern. "He has worked tirelessly to place Australian ICT research in a global context and has been the driving force behind internationally successful research collaborations and NICTA spin-out companies," said Senator Conroy. "I trust he will continue to contribute to the development of a vibrant ICT sector in Australia and raising our profile on the international stage, and I look forward to working with him in the future."

The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, also welcomed the appointment. "Professor Durrant-Whyte is one of Australias most accomplished scientific researchers, with a history of academic excellence that stretches in an unbroken line back to his undergraduate years at the University of London. He is eminently qualified to lead Australias national ICT research institute." Senator Carr also recognised the contribution of outgoing NICTA CEO David Skellern. "Dr Skellern is internationally regarded for his vision, intellect and entrepreneurial skill. I thank him for leading NICTA to many significant achievements over the last five years."

The ACFR incorporates the Australian Research Councils (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Autonomous Systems, the Rio Tinto Centre for Mine Automation, the BAE Systems Strategic Partnership for Autonomous Systems and the Defence, Science and Technology Organisations (DSTO) Centre of Expertise in Unmanned and Autonomous Systems. Professor Durrant-Whyte has a strong academic and industry pedigree. He has published over 350 academic papers and is a Fellow of the Royal Society, the worlds pre-eminent learned society for science. He has twice been awarded an ARC Federation Fellowship.

National ICT Australia Ltd (NICTA), Australias Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Research Centre of Excellence, is developing technologies which will meet the current and future needs of the community in fields which will lead to large economic, social and environmental benefits for Australia. NICTA has five laboratories around the country. Since NICTA was founded in 2002, it has created four new companies, developed a substantial technology portfolio of patent applications and continues to supply new talent to the ICT industry through the NICTA-enhanced PhD program.

NICTA is funded by the Australian Government as represented by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and the Australian Research Council through the ICT Centre of Excellence program. In addition to federal funding NICTA is also funded and supported by the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland and Victorian Governments, The Australian National University, Griffith University, University of Melbourne, University of New South Wales, University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and The University of Sydney.

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