



Petratherm Director in new national role

Petratherm board member Richard Hillis is now heading a \$105 million Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for minerals exploration that will draw on the nation's preeminent research talent to significantly boost the mining industry and the economy.

The job entails overseeing extensive research into improving drilling, logging and geological targeting techniques to enable companies to drill cheaper, faster, more safely and more successfully for mineral deposits.

The CRC will be headquartered in Adelaide and is supported by \$1M cash and considerable in-kind technical support from the Department of Primary Industries and Resources of South Australia. The CRC also plans to develop Australia's first national drilling training and testing facility in South Australia.

Dr Hillis, the recently appointed Chief Executive Officer of the new Deep Exploration Technologies CRC, said the centre has been awarded \$28 million in Federal Government funding along with \$20 million industry funding and another \$50 million in university, CSIRO and industry in-kind support.

"This centre will embark on important research that will contribute to growing the mining industry and the economy by finding better and cheaper ways to target, drill and assess mineral resources in Australia," Dr Hillis said.

Dr Hillis was previously Head of the Australian School of Petroleum at the University of Adelaide where he was also the South Australian State Professor of Petroleum Geology. He was also the interim head of the SA Centre of Excellence for Geothermal Energy Research at the University of Adelaide and continues to be a non-executive director of leading South Australian geothermal company Petratherm Ltd.

"The CRC's work also has the potential to provide important information and technology assistance to the geothermal industry. Many of the problems related to cheaper, faster drilling of hard rocks are shared by the minerals and geothermal industries," Dr Hillis said.

The Deep Exploration Technologies CRC will operate three key research programs.

- Technologies to drill cheaper, faster and more safely - led by CSIRO Exploration and Mining and including drilling company Boart Longyear - and also the planned national drilling training and testing facility.
- Improving the timeliness of data from exploration holes during drilling (e.g. on the presence of economic mineralization), either real time from sensors near the drill bit or from on-site analysis. Such will result in major savings by permitting immediate follow-up drilling without remobilizing drill rigs. This program is to be led by Curtin University of Technology.

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- Improving the use of geology and geophysics for deep targeting of mineral deposits. This program is intended to improve the success rate of holes seeking economic mineralization under cover rocks and is to be led by the University of Adelaide.

The University of Western Australia and Geoscience Australia are also collaborating in the CRC. Core industry partners are Barrick Gold, BHP Billiton, Boart Longyear, Goldfields Australia, Newcrest and Vale Exploration.

Dr Hillis said that it was planned to headquarter the CRC at the new Boart Longyear offices in Adelaide and researchers would also conduct case studies at mines throughout Australia. The embedding of the CRC headquarters with Boart Longyear, and of researchers with industry, is aimed to increase the applicability and industry uptake of the CRC's research.

“Minerals exploration in Australia is increasingly directed towards discoveries at greater depth beneath cover rocks and thus the cost of exploration continues to increase. The CRC aims to reduce the risk and the cost of deep exploration,” he said.

“The industry has been willing to invest in the CRC because of its need for a new generation of drilling, data analysis and geological technologies. The CRC proposal was brokered by AMIRA International (a minerals industry association which develops syndicated research projects) who will maintain close links with the CRC”.

Richard Hillis's research expertise is in the area of petroleum geomechanics and sedimentary basin tectonics and their applications to the petroleum, geothermal and CO₂ sequestration industries. He has undertaken numerous consulting projects for the international oil industry, and has taught industry professional short courses on these subjects in Australia, Brunei, Malaysia, Japan, Vietnam, and the United Kingdom. Dr Hillis, who has authored over 100 scientific papers and edited two books, headed a research group within the Australian School of Petroleum at the University of Adelaide.

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