National Security S&T Workshop Summary
27 November 2013

Introduction

The inaugural National Security S&T Workshop was held on Wednesday 27 November 2013 in Canberra. The aim of this workshop was to provide the opportunity for national security policy makers, user agencies and S&T providers, to identify challenges and potential solutions for effectively and efficiently accessing and/or delivering S&T.

The outcomes from the workshop included: a greater awareness of the national security landscape and the value of S&T to Australia's national security, an understanding of the intent and scope of a national security S&T policy framework, clarity on the role of DSTO in national security S&T and the fostering of a community of interest in national security S&T policy and planning. This workshop is a first step towards collaboratively developing a national security S&T policy and implementation plan which is expected to be finalised by 1 July 2014.

Attendance

The workshop was attended by 55 people, representing 35 organisations from the Australian Government, State Governments, academia, industry and publicly funded research agencies. The attendees brought to the workshop, a wealth of knowledge and expertise in applying and delivering S&T to address national security problems.

Key issues

The following is a summary of the key points raised during the workshop. A more detailed analysis of the workshop outcomes is being undertaken as part of the policy development process.

Policy rationale and intent

- The NS S&T Policy rationale must be premised on the value that S&T brings to national security – ie. the value of S&T in helping articulate the issues, anticipating the problems and developing and shaping current and future capability, operational and policy responses. S&T should be viewed as symbiotic with national security.

- The policy must clearly articulate a shared strategic vision. The scope of the policy must align with the new government's national security agenda which is likely to have a more traditional focus. Priorities are still being articulated.
- In developing a whole of government approach to NS S&T, the lessons learned from the National Security Science and Innovation Strategy (NSSIS) 2009 should be applied and aspects which remain relevant and effective built upon.

Coordination, leadership and governance

- There are clear benefits to be gained by increasing the visibility across the NS S&T community of what S&T work is going on, who is involved, what and where are the current capability and skills and where are there gaps.
- There is some good evidence to show that some organisations are working together well in some areas (e.g CBRN). However better coordination and integration of existing capabilities at a national level is needed.
- NS S&T needs a champion. DSTO is seen as integral in coordinating across the NS and S&T communities.
- Knowledge management and sharing information is critical but there are challenges to manage (e.g. IP, security, academic publishing)
- Governance structures and bureaucratic processes must not stifle innovation. They must be agile, adaptable and value-adding.
- A steering committee with senior representatives from industry, government, and academia can be an effective coordination mechanism provided the group is held accountable and empowered to make decisions (e.g. implementation strategies reflecting the governments NS S&T priorities).

Funding and delivery models

- Centrally controlled funding is difficult to manage, more exposed to large scale budget cuts and threatens the autonomy of funding decisions at an agency level.
- A co-funding arrangement whereby government funding is matched by industry, academic or other research partners (domestically or internationally) has significant leveraging power. It not only enhances the diversity of skills and expertise involved, it also helps expedite the delivery of S&T support.
- Opportunities should be explored for influencing extant research funding allocations to address national security problems.
- The creation of 'taskforces' could quickly bring together specialists that can deliver short term S&T support and/or determine stakeholder S&T needs.
- Medium-longer term research that looks 5-15 years ahead is still important to anticipate future threats and develop future capabilities.

Industry

- Industry engagement is critical and engagement with users as early as possible is needed.

- There must be clear incentives and benefits for industry to participate, with evident continuity of return on investment
- Industry has significant intellectual capital which may be harnessed effectively.
- Industry engagement or industry led research is attractive to State governments.

Way ahead

The team will examine the various ideas presented and discussed. There were some useful general principles articulated, as well as a range of practical suggestions for implementation. These will inform the next step of the development process