



**Policy submission**

# **Possible association to Horizon Europe: request for information**

**Submission to: The Department of Industry Science and  
Resources**

**March 2026**

# Submission to the Possible association to Horizon Europe: request for information

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings together the multidisciplinary expertise of our nation's leading thinkers to provide practical, evidence-based advice on important social issues facing society.

As the pre-eminent organisation in Australia representing excellence across the social science disciplines, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the *Possible association to Horizon Europe: request for information*.

## Overview

The Academy welcomes the commencement of treaty negotiations on Australia's association to Horizon Europe. Association would provide Australian researchers and industry partners with direct access to global knowledge networks, large scale mission-driven funding opportunities and structured pathways for knowledge diffusion and research impact. Participation would strengthen our national research and innovation capability and could unlock substantial social and economic benefits for Australia.

Closer integration with Horizon Europe will deepen Australia's connections to Europe, building on momentum generated through the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement. Australian research through Horizon Europe can also contribute to realising the outcomes and benefits of the Agreement.

**The social sciences are essential to navigating complex global issues and will play a central role in Australia's participation in Horizon Europe.** Social science research is explicitly supported under Horizon Europe's Cluster 2—*Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society*—reflecting its critical role in strengthening democratic resilience and driving social transformation. Moreover, social science expertise is integral to interdisciplinary research across all thematic clusters and cross-cutting missions including areas such as health, digital, climate change, environment and security to produce more equitable, effective and scalable outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Australia is well positioned to pursue association with Horizon Europe based on the clear alignment between our respective research priorities and existing cooperation frameworks with the European Union.

We make two recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** Ensure association costs are not drawn from existing Australia Research Council (ARC) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) budgets which are already under considerable strain.
- **Recommendation 2:** Establish the dedicated support mechanisms and infrastructure required to maximise Australia's participation success and return on investment, utilising the expertise and skills of all disciplines.

To discuss any matters raised in this submission, please contact Andrea Verdich, Policy Director on 0438 218 352, or [andrea.verdich@socialsciences.org.au](mailto:andrea.verdich@socialsciences.org.au).

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<sup>1</sup> Morazzo et. al. (2024) [Opportunities for Researchers from the Social Sciences and Humanities \(SSH\) in Horizon Europe](#)

## What benefit would association to Horizon Europe bring to your organisation or Australia?

Australia's research system is uniquely positioned to contribute to—and benefit from—Horizon Europe by delivering practical expertise that is often in high demand but relatively scarce within existing networks.

Australian social science researchers have developed globally respected approaches to working with First Nations communities, grounded in principles of co-design, cultural safety, and ethical engagement, alongside leadership in advancing Indigenous data sovereignty frameworks. These capabilities are complemented by expertise conducting research across diverse multicultural populations and in geographically remote communities—contexts that mirror many of the societal challenges addressed in Horizon Europe missions and clusters.

**Association with Horizon Europe represents a low-risk, high-return initiative that could deliver significant benefits to Australia by:**

- **Unlocking full funding eligibility for Australian social science researchers:** Association provides access to the final years of the largest single research fund globally, enabling Australian researchers to lead and fully participate in Horizon Europe funded projects, rather than being limited to partner roles.
- **Strengthening national research priorities:** Horizon Europe's thematic priorities align with Australia's National Science and Research Priorities and Future Made in Australia agenda, boosting areas like clean energy, health, digital technologies, and climate solutions. The priorities also overlap with proposed Pillars in the just completed Report of the Strategic Examination of Research and Development. Pooling knowledge, resources, and infrastructure across countries under a large-scale program like Horizon Europe will enable projects at a scale that would be difficult to fund through national programs alone. It also ensures global solutions incorporate Australian perspectives.
- **Driving economic and societal benefits:** Horizon Europe has proven to be a strong driver of economic and societal outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Associated countries, like New Zealand, have reported remarkable results in terms of application success rates and access to funding.<sup>3</sup> The mission-oriented structure of Pillar II, and the requirement to include collaborators across key sectors, supports the Australian government's research translation and productivity agendas by linking outcomes to real-world impact. Association to Horizon Europe unlocks research funding opportunities in areas that would support Australian exporters looking to benefit from the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement. The broader Australian economy also stands to benefit from increased research investment by:
  - an average of \$3.50 in economy-wide benefits for each dollar invested in research and development and a 10% average annual return.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2025) [For every euro invested Horizon Europe generates up to €11 in economic gains](#) [press release]

<sup>3</sup> [New Zealand's Association to Horizon Europe: Twelve Months On - March 2024](#)

<sup>4</sup> CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) (2021) [Quantifying Australia's returns to innovation](#)

- an increase in productivity growth, technological progress, and improvements in efficiency.<sup>5</sup> Research suggests significant spillovers to productivity from public sector research and development spending on research agencies and higher education.<sup>6</sup>
- **Minimising geopolitical risk and strengthening cultural and science diplomacy:** Association would diversify Australia’s research partnerships and provide a platform for cultural and science diplomacy. Australia’s unique geopolitical position enables it to act as a bridge between European and Asia-Pacific research networks to support global collaboration on climate and environmental change and other pressing regional challenges.
- **Expanding network access and capability building:** Research is increasingly a global endeavour. Association embeds Australian researchers in large-scale, multidisciplinary international consortia, expanding networks and access to European expertise and infrastructure. Participation can enhance researcher training, career pathways, and recruitment and retention of talent. It can also build national capability in international grant competitiveness, mission-oriented research, and translation. Academy Fellows who have participated in Horizon projects describe them as career defining experiences, due to the scale and resources involved.

**It is vital that association with Horizon Europe does not compromise Australia’s domestic research investment, which is already under considerable strain.** The [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#) and [Ambitious Australia: Strategic Examination of R&D Final Report](#) both highlighted Australia’s R&D expenditure overall is low for an advanced economy and specifically called for immediate action to reverse the fall in support for foundational research.

Therefore, budget allocation to cover Horizon Europe participation costs and overheads must be secured from new investment and not diverted from the existing Australian Research Council (ARC) or the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) existing budgets.

**Recommendation 1:** Ensure association costs are not drawn from existing Australia Research Council (ARC) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) budgets which are already under considerable strain.

## If Australia associates to Horizon Europe, what implementation models do you suggest for maximising the benefit from the Horizon Europe funding and alignment with Australian science priorities?

An implementation model could include the following components to maximise Australia’s return on investment:

- **Invest upfront in relationships:** Implement networking initiatives to increasing visibility, exposure, and opportunities to form partnerships between Australian and European institutions. Funding under Pillar I – Excellent Science, such as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, should be strategically accessed to enhance Australia’s capacity, including in the social sciences, to participate in Pillar II project proposals.

<sup>5</sup> Forthcoming analysis by Elnasri and Fox.

<sup>6</sup> Elnasri and Fox. (2014). [The Contribution of Research and Innovation to Productivity and Economic Growth](#).

- **National contact hub and national contact points network:** Establish a single contact hub in Australia to coordinate participation in Horizon Europe and channel domestic and international engagement. The central hub should connect to a network of National Contact Points (NCPs) who are subject matter experts in the thematic clusters of Pillar II. The NCPs should be researchers with experience in engaging with funders, building networks, and supporting programmatic growth, who can actively broker multidisciplinary opportunities and support applicants.
- **National overhead scheme:** establish a well-considered overheads scheme to help participants meet cost requirements and improve participation capacity in Horizon Europe calls. The scheme must apply to all Pillar II clusters.

**Recommendation 2:** Establish the dedicated support mechanisms and infrastructure required to maximise Australia’s participation success and return on investment, utilising the expertise and skills of all disciplines.