

Robotics push for Emerald

26/10/2021



A number of robotics companies have signed up to the proposal, including local start-up star SwarmFarm Robotics.

By Duncan Evans

A \$75 million robotics test facility and 'Tech Park' could be coming to Emerald, with peak body Robotics Australia Group (RAG) set to lobby the federal government for support to see the project come to fruition.

RAG wants to develop an Australian Robotics Ventures Factory (RoboFactory) and build an Emerald Tech Park to grow Australian robotics companies, design and test new industry solutions for the agriculture, resources, defence and space sectors and train current and future workers.

The RoboFactory is not a physical asset per se, but rather an integrated platform which can interconnect with test facilities and enterprises across the country. The Tech Park, by contrast, is a physical entity and would be located at the old Agricultural College.

RAG Corporate Affairs Manager Nicole Ireland told CQ Today the group had selected Emerald for the Tech Park for a number of reasons.

“Emerald is an ideal location for the Tech Park for a number of reasons,” she said.

“One, the established agriculture and mining sectors in the area and nearby defence and space industries. Two, a strong innovation culture, and three, the existence of a ‘brownfield’ site at the former Emerald Agricultural College which will host DAF’s (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries) Smart Cropping Centre and potentially other aligned facilities.”

Ms Ireland said RAG had applied for one third of the \$75 million figure from the Commonwealth MMI-Collaboration program, and would also look to the state government for support through its Industry Partnership Program.

Alongside RAG, a number of robotics companies have signed up to the proposal or are ready to join, including BIA5, Artemis Robotics, Universal Field Robotics (UFR), Presien, SkyGrow, Micromelon Robotics, Hindsite Industries, Freelance Robotics, Real Serious Games and local start-up star SwarmFarm Robotics, featured in the February 4 edition of CQ Today.

“We’re building robotics companies, not just building components,” Ms Ireland said in a telephone call with CQ Today.

At present, the project is in the concept stage. Further funding would see it progress to the full definition and then construction phase.

RAG Executive Director Dr Sharna Glover said the proposal was a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ opportunity for Queensland and Australia.

“Industry is tired of importing solutions – they want to partner with Australian companies who are among the best in the world and have that expertise available locally,” she said.

“Importantly, in the Central Highlands, the RoboFactory will support new training pathways to prepare the regional workforce for the jobs of the future and provide education and upskilling opportunities to equip workers in agriculture and mining with Industry 4.0 relevant skills.”

Central Highlands Mayor Kerry Hayes supports the proposal.

“The Central Highlands is the pre-eminent location for this exciting new venture,” Mayor Hayes said in a RAG press release from Monday.

“Nowhere in the nation is there a closer symbiosis between agricultural and mining technology in practical operation and displaying its real value.”