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## **NICTA mouse killer**

Simon Hayes | May 10, 2005

**THE computer mouse could become a thing of the past in some workplaces if staff at technology researcher National ICT Australia have anything to do with it.**

Researchers in NICTA's multimodal user interface project are developing an add-on to popular operating systems, such as Windows and Mac, for users to control computers by nods of the head, hand gestures and speech.

The technology is aimed at workplaces where users cannot touch an ordinary computer keyboard, such as surgeons scrubbed for the operating theatre or motor mechanics with greasy hands.

"You might even have lots of paper on your desk and not be able to access your mouse," NICTA senior research engineer Ronnie Taib says.

"This technology could also be used by disabled people."

The software runs on an ordinary PC, and could be used commercially in a short time.

The head-operated PC is part of a wider NICTA research program on human-machine interaction.

Other projects include software that allows users to "feel" links between data using a pointer.

NICTA is studying cognitive overload: situations in which users of multiple systems are unable to process all the information – perhaps confirming what computer users have always suspected.

NICTA is examining how data can best be conveyed to, and processed by, users.

Taib says NICTA is working with the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority, where users in its traffic control room have access to multiple screens and computer systems.

"They have complex systems, and tens of applications," he said.

"Sometimes tasks have to be done, but if you keep overloading users they will fail."

NICTA's directors refuse to comment on speculation that chairman Neville Roach will shortly step down. Roach, however, says the organisation needs "renewal and change". "Until the electoral college of NICTA decides it's appropriate to make an announcement everything is speculation," he says.

"There's no question the AGM, at the end of this month, is a good time to stand down.

"All of the directors but one have completed their initial terms, and there will be some stepping down and some reappointments."

NICTA has lost its chief executive Mel Slater, who will return to the US at the end of May. Slater will be replaced as interim chief executive by David Skellern, a NICTA director.

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