



Media Release

5 September, 2011

Leading computer scientist Pascal Van Hentenryck joins NICTA

Pascal Van Hentenryck, a pioneer in the field of constraint programming, has joined NICTA to lead its Optimisation Research Group. He was most recently Professor of Computer Science at Brown University and Director of the university's Optimisation Laboratory. Professor Van Hentenryck will lead a team of 48 staff to tackle research challenges in areas such as supply chains, smart grids, disaster recovery, computational biology and social networks.

"I am very excited about joining NICTA and working with a talented research team to develop technologies that will support some of Australia's most important industries," he said. "NICTA has recognised the increasingly pervasive role of optimisation in information technology. As a group, we aim to push the frontiers of optimisation to build smarter and more agile infrastructures, to elucidate and regulate large-scale biological and social processes and more generally, to plan and control data-intensive and decentralised systems such as smart grids and complex transport networks."

Prof. Van Hentenryck is one of the most highly cited researchers in computer science. He undertook foundational work on constraint programming in the 1980s, and then developed three major systems: the OPL modelling language supported by IBM and used by operations researchers worldwide; Numerica, the first system to show the power of constraint programming to solve complex non-linear problems, and the Comet programming language which supports constraint-based local search, constraint programming and mathematical programming. His recent research on disaster planning and response has also been deployed to help federal agencies in the United States to mitigate the effects of hurricanes on coastal areas.

Prof. Van Hentenryck has also been appointed Professor in the School of Engineering at the University of Melbourne. He commences his tenure at NICTA and the University in January 2012.

"Our Optimisation Research Group is recognised as one of the best in the world," said Prof. Hugh Durrant-Whyte, NICTA's Chief Executive Officer. "We are delighted to welcome Professor Van Hentenryck to lead this world-class team as it continues to undertake groundbreaking research to address some of the world's most pressing economic and social challenges."

Members of NICTA's Optimisation Research Group include Toby Walsh and Nina Narodytska, winners of the Outstanding Paper Award at the 2011 Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence Conference; Peter Stuckey, winner of the Australian Museum's inaugural Google Eureka prize for Computer Science in 2010; Sylvie Thiebaut, President-elect of the International Conference on Automated Planning and Scheduling, the premier forum for researchers and practitioners in planning and scheduling, and Mark Wallace and his team, who developed the hybrid platform ECLiPSe, bought in 2004 by Cisco Systems.

About NICTA

National ICT Australia Ltd (NICTA), Australia's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Research Centre of Excellence, is developing technologies which will meet the current and future needs of the community in fields which will lead to large economic, social and environmental benefits for Australia. NICTA has five laboratories around the country. Since NICTA was founded in 2002, it has created five new companies, developed a substantial technology and intellectual property portfolio and continues to supply new talent to the ICT industry through the NICTA-enhanced PhD program.

NICTA is funded by the Australian Government as represented by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and the Australian Research Council through the ICT Centre of Excellence program. In addition to federal funding NICTA is also funded and supported by the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland and Victorian Governments, The Australian National University, Griffith University, University of Melbourne, University of New South Wales, University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and The University of Sydney.

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