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ARC Training Centre Debuts to Boost Sustainable Battery Tech for Circular Economy

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The Australian Research Council (ARC) Training Centre for Battery Recycling, launched on July 22, 2025, at the University of Adelaide, aims to tackle lithium-ion battery (LIB) waste through advanced recycling and workforce training. While promising economic benefits, critics question the Labor government's heavy reliance on such initiatives to drive Australia's circular economy.

With a \$14.92 million budget, the ARC Training Centre for Battery Recycling unites nine organizations, including the University of New South Wales, University of Wollongong, and industry partners like Iondrive Technologies. Led by Professor Shizhang Qiao, the

centre focuses on five research themes: pre-treatment, second-life management, recycling spent batteries, resynthesizing materials, and designing recyclable batteries. Qiao emphasized, “This will shape a profitable, self-sustaining industry, ensuring Australia’s energy security” (Newswise, 2025). The initiative aims to eliminate LIB waste to landfills, recovering critical materials like lithium and cobalt to reduce reliance on foreign supplies, bolstering economic resilience.

The centre’s economic potential is significant, promising to transform Australia’s battery industry by fostering advanced manufacturing. By recycling materials for new batteries, it could lower production costs and stabilize supply chains, vital as electric vehicle (EV) demand surges. The program will train 19 PhD students and four postdoctoral fellows, building a skilled workforce to drive innovation. However, skeptics argue the Labor government’s focus on centralized research hubs neglects broader industrial policy needs. Shadow Industry Minister Jane Hume criticized the approach, stating, “We need practical incentives for private investment, not just academic projects” (The Australian, 2025).

Critics also highlight the government’s slow progress on regulatory frameworks to support recycling industries. Without clear policies, businesses face uncertainty, potentially stunting economic growth. The centre’s collaboration with industry is a step forward, but opponents argue that tax breaks and streamlined approvals would better spur private-sector innovation. While the initiative promises to position Australia as a leader in sustainable energy, its success hinges on balancing ambitious goals with pragmatic economic policies to ensure a robust, market-driven circular economy.