



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF AUSTRALIAN FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE
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I want to extend my sincere thanks to you, Professor Craig, and to the Academy, for the honour you have done me today.

Australia's international image as a modern and sophisticated society - and not just our image, but our capacity to be a modern and sophisticated society - is profoundly influenced by the standing and achievements of our scientists and our scientific institutions.

As Australia's national scientific Academy, you play a vital role in maintaining and enhancing that image and that capacity by establishing and maintaining standards of scientific endeavour and achievement, by recognising outstanding contributions to the advancement of science, and by maintaining open channels with your peers abroad.

Election to the Academy recognises that an Australian researcher is of the highest international standard. The fact that a disproportionately high number of your Fellows have also been elected to the Royal Society of London and to the US National Academy of Sciences is a valid measure of the quality and standing of Australian science.

So to have received this honour from you is something I truly value. I accept it not as a personal tribute but as a vote of confidence by the scientific community in the thrust of the decisions my Government has taken in recent years.

We have endeavoured to promote the emergence in this country of a culture in which science and technology are vital elements. While it is heartening to know you appreciate the Government's role in that endeavour, let me acknowledge that the effort has truly been a collective one, reliant on the broader scientific community for its success. To that extent this medal also belongs to those many people in the scientific community - including many here today - who have offered us their advice, wisdom and support.

Ever since the First Fleet Lieutenant, William Dawes, began setting up his astronomical observatory at Port Jackson, Australia has been a fertile and productive soil for basic scientific inquiry.

From Lt Dawes' telescope through to the giant radioastronomy dishes that scan the skies from western New South Wales, and in every other field of research, it has been the public sector at the forefront of the nation's scientific effort - the public sector, as a proud and committed sponsor of Australian science.

Even so, the increased pressure on Government budgets, the proliferation of exciting and important fields of research, and, I believe, an increasing and legitimate demand by society for the products of relevant research have all meant that science has had to struggle for fair recognition of its role and importance.

I don't think I would find any argument about that here!

So it was all the more significant then, that the recent election saw for the first time the discussion of science as an issue in its own right.

You recall I said during the election campaign that Australians can be content no longer to be the lucky country - we need also to become the clever country.

To that end, we had allocated - before the election - \$1 billion for a package of science and technology measures and we have moved - since the election - to implement my election promise to create a network of Cooperative Research Centres.

It's not my intention to outline these measures in detail today.

Let me remind you instead why we have allocated such considerable sums of public money to science - why, for instance, we consider it important to keep young Australian researchers in Australia and give them the support and recognition their work deserves.

The answer of course is that if we are to maintain our place in the first rank of the developed nations we must embrace, and embrace enthusiastically, a culture in which science and technology play central roles.

We are, after all, in the region of the world which is growing fastest and which counts among its member countries some of those at the forefront of scientific effort.

To maintain and improve living standards for all Australians we must increasingly add value to our natural endowments. We must develop a wide range of goods and services which will be world competitive because their competitiveness has been enhanced through the application of Australian cleverness.

Thirty years ago, C.P. Snow bemoaned the chasm between the 'two cultures' of liberal and scientific research. Today, the challenge is more urgent. We need to build a bridge over the gulf that has kept science and scientists too isolated from the broader social imperative of creating and enhancing prosperity.

I don't dispute that a clever country is one in which basic scientific research can take place unfettered by the demands to make it turn a dollar. But at the same time, a clever country is one in which the best scientific minds of the country are alive to the questions posed by that other science - the dismal science, economics: how to lift prosperity, enhance economic competitiveness, boost productivity.

In a clever country, "Made in Australia" must become synonymous with high quality content and performance. It must be a symbol of skill, not just good fortune.

That is ultimately why reforms such as the Prime Minister's Science Council and the Cooperative Research Centres are critically important initiatives.

Let me say too how pleased I am with the way in which both these initiatives are progressing.

The new policy machinery for science and technology has three elements: the Chief Scientist, Professor Ralph Slatyer; the Prime Minister's Science Council; and the Coordination Committee on Science and Technology. Together with ASTEC, they provide the Government as a whole, and me in particular, with a breadth and depth of policy advice never previously available to a Commonwealth Government.

The Science Council has already attracted widespread attention. It is a high level forum at which science and technology issues of national importance can be discussed with me and my senior Ministerial colleagues, in the presence of leading representatives from the business, research and government communities. I am pleased to note that you, Professor Craig, and your predecessor, have participated in each of the meetings already held and made valuable contributions to them.

This Council has established a forum comparable in effectiveness to that in other leading countries - namely, a forum that reports directly to the Head of Government. This arrangement was strongly supported by the Academy for the very good reason that issues of science and technology now pervade the Commonwealth bureaucracy. In order to provide an overview of science and technology, it is essential that the advisory mechanisms focus on the Head of Government.

This machinery is being strengthened by the progressive establishment of a network of science advisors, at a very senior level, in those Departments with major responsibilities for performing or funding science.

Turning to the Cooperative Research Centres Program, I am delighted with the enormous support it has received from the scientific community, from industry groups and from State and Commonwealth bodies.

The Centres stand for excellence, relevance and cooperation: excellence of research, and relevance and applicability of research results, achieved through cooperation between researchers and research users.

It is a formula for good science - a formula, we believe, for successfully making the clever country a reality.

I am conscious that the establishment of the program has resulted in people from a wide variety of institutions talking to one another and establishing cooperative arrangements, to a degree which has never happened before.

In a very real sense this important process is as important as the Centres which finally emerge and I hope that, even for those proposals which may fail to obtain funding, enduring cooperation arrangements will become established.

I take this opportunity of placing on record again the critically important role played by Ralph Slatyer in the preparation and development of this concept.

Professor Craig,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is deeply appropriate that we should today be marking the establishment by the Academy of the Australian Foundation for Science. This is a very welcome initiative.

The Academy already has a strong record of achievement in raising the quality of scientific education and improving public awareness of science.

The text books produced by the Academy have served generations of Australian school children well. The Academy's Science and Industry Forum has been instrumental in bringing together leaders of industry, science and government.

This new initiative of yours can build on these activities. It can draw research organisations, business and government together to promote science and in turn show how that science can be used for the benefit of the nation. I am particularly pleased to see ANZAAS, Australia's oldest organisation for the promotion of science, and the Australian Science Teachers' Association, have both decided to join the Foundation.

I congratulate the Academy on proposing this way to meet the challenges ahead and congratulate the Fellows on backing it so strongly with their own resources. I hope the venture gains similar support from the whole scientific community, industry and the community generally. We all have much to gain from a broader acceptance of the value of science and technology to our society.

In thanking you again for the award you have given me, it is now my pleasure to launch the Australian Foundation for Science.

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