



## PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
PRESENTATION OF AUSTRALIA PRIZE, GREAT HALL, PARLIAMENT  
HOUSE, MONDAY, 27 APRIL 1992

It gives me great pleasure to host this second presentation of the Australia Prize.

The Australia Prize honours outstanding achievement in science and technology.

It honours the intelligent, commercial application of science to develop the technology essential to create wealth and human welfare.

It celebrates Australia's place in the world as an advanced and enlightened nation.

We Australians are inclined to underestimate our achievements in science and technology - or, rather, we do not know enough about them.

We learnt at school that innovation and invention were essential to our success in conquering the land and the great distances which separate us from the rest of the world.

So we came away knowing about the MacArthurs' development of Merino sheep, Farrer's experiments with wheat, MacKay's Harvester, Mort's development of refrigeration, the stump jump plough and myxomatosis.

There was a certain romance to these developments by virtue of their being part of the rural pioneering legend of Australia.

They were presented to us as principal reasons for our success in building a good society here.

Our successes in industrial technology have not attracted the same attention.

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Nor have our efforts in the field in which tonight's awards are made - physical sciences related to mining or processing of mineral resources.

It is safe to say that very few Australians are aware of the Isasmelt process for base metals which Mt Isa Mines and the CSIRO developed.

It's doubtful if many know about CRA's technology for the rapid sorting of diamonds, or the "Jameson cell" flotation process for the separation of minerals.

These technologies are not well known, and the effort and ingenuity that went into them are not widely acknowledged.

Yet these sorts of successes in research and development are as vital to our future as any of the legendary ploughs and wheat breeds were.

So in presenting the Australia Prize tonight we hope that, over and above reward and acknowledgment for the winners, we are signalling recognition for all the workers in this field - past and present.

You will be aware that last week I was in Indonesia.

I went there to consolidate our relationship and pave the way for a great expansion of our economic relationship.

The opportunities are enormous - we are talking about a rapidly developing, resource rich country of 180 million people.

We have much of the technology, the processes and the experience Indonesia - and the wider South-east Asian region - needs.

The application of our skills in these countries has more than a commercial significance, of course. Very often it means that people there are healthier and better fed and housed, - that they have better lives and more opportunities.

Tonight I can say to the winners of the Australia Prize, and all those others engaged in the field - the work you do is at the very heart of our future in the region and in the world.

And, of course, what we do there will determine, to a very large extent, the sort of the society we can build here.

In a real sense our solutions to the problem of unemployment, our ability to sustain our way of life and our standard of living, depend on our success in Asia and Pacific - and our success there depends largely on our scientific and technological skills and the selling of them.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Australia Prize is an international award and this year it demonstrates that our science and technology are among the best in the world.

The four winners in this year's field have put Australia in a position of world leadership in developing and making commercial on-line instrumentation in the coal industry.

The work of tonight's winners is a contemporary example of the impressive record of Australians in mining and mineral processing technologies.

For in fact much of the innovation in the mining industry worldwide is the result of the work of Australian scientists, technologists and engineers.

It is important that this aspect of 'Australian development be more generally known, to provide perspective on the benefits available from science and technology and to establish an environment that nurtures intellectual achievement.

We need to build on our past achievements. In particular, we must improve our commercial acumen.

We must sharpen our ability to develop Australian ideas and adapt the ideas of others to gain competitive advantage.

The importance of the Australian Prize is that it places Australian science in this international context.

Globalisation of technology is not just a concept, but an important part of Australia's new outward looking culture.

Science and technology can be of great benefit to Australia. They hold the key to solving many economic, social, medical and environmental problems.

The Government has recognised this, and is committed to maintaining a vigorous science and technology system.

Our initiatives in stimulating industrial R&D, strengthening the public sector research base and enhancing linkages between researchers and research users, are directed to providing the strong and vital innovative capacity that is needed for sustained economic growth.

It is a mark of this commitment that Government support for science and innovation has grown by 29 per cent in real terms since 1982-83.

The Australia Prize is a small but important part of this support, and the work of tonight's winners a tribute to the national science effort.

I would like to record the Government's gratitude to the Australian Prize a Committee.

This panel of distinguished Australians has again brought wide knowledge and experience to bear on a challenging task. Our Master of Ceremonies, Sir Rupert Myers, has chaired the Committee for the last two years.

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we honour Australian endeavour. We congratulate the winners individually and collectively for their outstanding achievements.

They are achievements of which Australian should be proud.

It is equally true that we should be grateful and - I hope, inspired.