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## PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP**

**NATIONAL EXPORT AWARDS PRESENTATION  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA - 20 NOVEMBER 1992**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you this evening to participate in these awards and to celebrate Australia's export achievements in the past year.

I commend the efforts of the Austrade and its fellow sponsors in identifying Australia's best.

I know from travelling round the country how difficult the final choices must have been.

There is so much talent out there, and commitment to excellence is becoming a defining quality of much of our business and industry.

These awards are a recognised national institution. For nearly thirty years they have recognised the tremendous contribution Australian exporters make to the nation's prosperity.

There is no one in this room tonight who does not know that Australia's future depends upon our ability to compete in the world.

Such is the level of economic awareness in Australia these days, I doubt if there are many Australians who do not know it.

For employment opportunities to expand and for living standards to grow we need more companies like those represented here tonight - companies prepared to pursue export opportunities and with the determination and nous to succeed.

You are here tonight because you have passed the ultimate test and succeeded internationally. Passed it with flying colours.

You've done it by concentrating on quality, skills, workplace relationships, design, technology, management, market responsiveness. You've done it with international best practice.

The last twelve months have seen a difficult international trading environment. Not a few of our most substantial trading partners are either in recession or experiencing very slow growth.

So it is all the more a triumph to see Australian ventures succeeding in a diverse range of markets.

We see this diversity among the finalists tonight.

We have Australians selling cars and car parts to the US and Asia.

Australians selling cheesecake and pet food to Japan.

Australian suppliers of bag-handling systems and packaging machinery to Asia, France, the Pacific and the US.

Australians consulting on major infrastructure projects in Asia.

Australians exporting high technology computer equipment and software around the world.

Australians providing engineering equipment, concrete mixers and state of the art refrigeration technologies and storage containers.

Australians exporting medical products for sleep disorders, and training videos for occupational health.

Australians exporting high tech scientific equipment and specialised resource mapping services.

Australians exporting gas cylinders and steel.

Australians exporting magnesia, salt, iron ore, oil and gas.

Ladies and gentlemen

Australia is a global trader. We are dependent on an open, liberal trading environment.

Australia's overriding foreign economic policy priority is to preserve and enhance a trading environment in which our major markets become more open to us and to each other.

For our part, the Government is always on the look-out for ways of securing better conditions for our trade, in whatever context, be it multilateral, regional or bilateral.

The Government today, and everyday, is working to see the global trading rules improved, market distortions removed and our access to markets enhanced.

In a changing economic world, Australia needs to be open minded about the institutional forums and the arrangements we might enter to secure these objectives.

We do not rule out bilateral trading agreements or membership of regional trading arrangements as means of achieving our goals in trade.

Nor do we wish to pursue agreements which are prejudicial to our interests.

The Trade Investment Framework Arrangement which we are now concluding with the United States is an initiative which arose during the visit of President Bush in January.

It is an example of our willingness to enter into understandings which suit our interests, and which fit well with the development of the region's trade patterns.

The arrangement will provide Australia with a valuable opportunity to hold high-level consultations on issues such as subsidies, quotas and non tariff barriers which effect some of our exports to the United States, such as beef, sugar and steel.

Our overall interests are clear. A strong liberal global trading system based on the GATT and a successful Uruguay Round outcome will mean a universal liberalisation of markets.

A Pacific-wide trading area, with its most powerful economies building closer trade and investment bonds, helps ensure individual markets are fired by the vigour of prosperity and open trade.

And the facts around these interests are clear.

Australia's overall trade performance and our ability to negotiate better access for our exports depend substantially on the competitiveness and performance of the national economy.

A decade ago our cost structure made it hard for exporters to compete.

Today we have increased our competitiveness substantially, and entrenched our competitive advantages with low inflation and higher productivity growth.

More importantly, we have encouraged a wholesale shift into enterprise bargaining as the principal means of deciding wages, and pushed forward a program of industry reform which has dramatically increased the productivity of our ports, and changed the face of our aviation and telecommunications industries.

These industries are, of course, vital to exporting.

No one should be under any illusions about these reforms - both their strengths and their present limitations.

They are overdue. There is, no doubt, still some way to go: just as there is still a way to go in developing a thoroughgoing export culture in Australia - meaning an awareness at every level of the community, that it is from what we do and what we make that success will spring.

But that awareness has grown dramatically, and so has the pace of real reform in recent years. Without doubt, it has been much greater than anyone expected.

Take the key issue of industrial relations: we expect that by next year about half the Australian work force will be working under enterprise agreements.

From any perspective, that is phenomenally rapid change, and it is happening for the fundamental reason that we had a cultural change, a change in outlook, in the previous five or six years.

It was the change in attitude which underpins the concrete results we're now seeing.

And, truly, there can be no sense in ripping the heart out of reform - and with it, in large part, recovery - by smashing the cooperative ethic which has been fashioned.

Why declare war when the peace is working?

And when the only possible victory would leave us infinitely worse off?

Why go around the country saying, as the Victorian Premier did yesterday, - Have courage! Have courage! - when patently, by their actions, Australians do have courage: and, more than that, common sense, imagination, public spirit, the ability to work together.

The point is we have made extraordinary progress in the past decade, and the changes will breed more change. To reverse the progress will be to halt the change, and nothing could ever persuade me of the sense in doing that.

Ladies and gentlemen

Australian companies will benefit from the major investments we have made in infrastructure - in aviation, road and rail; in the doubling of productivity on our wharves, in reduced shipping costs, reduced telecommunications costs and improved services, and so on.

In our One Nation statement we also made changes to our business taxation system which make it one of the most competitive among industrial countries.

The important point to be made is that these reforms build on progress.

There has been a transformation of our trade - a transformation in volumes, composition and destination.

Exports of goods and services as a proportion of our national product have risen from less than 14 per cent ten years ago to 23 per cent today.

A decade ago we exported less than one sixth of our production.

As the sheer volume of our exports has increased, their composition and direction have changed.

The value of both our services exports and manufactured exports have tripled over the last decade.

Manufactures and services together accounted for 34 per cent of our exports in 1982. Last year they accounted for 40 per cent.

In the 1990s Australians are succeeding in tourism in ways unimaginable a decade ago.

In 1982 950,000 tourists visited Australia. Last year nearly 2.4 million arrived - an average growth rate of more than 10.6 per cent, and yielding an increase in foreign exchange earnings of \$6.3 billion dollars - from \$1.9 billion in 1982 to \$8.2 billion last year.

The forecast number of visitors in the year 2000 ranges between 4.8 million and 6.5 million.

There is no better or more obvious example of our individual and collective capacity to adapt, to develop skills and infrastructure, to exploit our natural advantages and add value, or to seize an opportunity in a competitive international market than the success of the tourism industry.

It now represents 12 per cent of our total exports - up from 7 per cent in 1982/83: and tourist operators, like all exporters, will continue to receive encouragement and support from this Government.

In the last decade or so the Asian region has been transformed into the most rapidly growing regional economy in the world, with a high share of exports, and a high degree of trade within the region.

Our economy is increasingly integrated into the region.

Nine out of ten of our largest export markets are now in Asia and the Pacific.

Last year about 60 per cent of our exports went to East Asia.

The Government is providing strategic support for a number of key export-oriented sectors, at the same time progressively lowering the tariff walls in order to assist restructuring and enhance competitiveness.

Many of the companies here tonight have worked in partnership with the Government in specific areas - for instance through the International Trade Enhancement Scheme, the Asia-Pacific Fellowships Scheme, or Austrade industry specialists - reflecting a joint long term commitment to exporting.

We have shown we can change and adapt.

We have shown we can work together. We have demonstrated our versatility in many fields of endeavour. We have shown that we can succeed.

But each of us here tonight knows that to get here has not been easy - it requires sustained application over the long haul - and we still have much to do.

The Government for its part will continue to encourage more Australian companies to export.

As well as the changes at home, we have been spreading the message abroad of the "new" Australia. I have made this a central theme of my visits this year to Indonesia, Japan and Singapore.

In the last two years, the Government has opened a number of new posts in the increasingly affluent Asian region.

Ladies and gentlemen, the success of the companies represented here tonight is an inspiration and example to others. They need only look to your success for confirmation that the labour is worthwhile.

Your imagination, determination, skills and effort constitute a profound contribution to the great national endeavour in the 1990s.

The effort to make Australia a vigorous trading nation and a prosperous society which can deliver employment opportunities to all.

Your success is a material contribution to that process, and a psychological one. Because success raises Australians' hope, competitive success in the world raises Australians' self-esteem.

It raises confidence and we will need that in the coming years, as much as anything else.

So I thank you all, and congratulate you.