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PRIME MINISTER

CANBERRA

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## NEW AUSTRALIAN MEDALS/AWARDS

I am pleased to announce today a series of initiatives to enhance the scope of the Australian system of honours and awards and to make it better known to the public.

As I announced in the House this afternoon, three new awards will be created and amendments made to broaden access to some existing awards. The new awards will be a significant means by which emergency and volunteer services can be better recognised. As I said this afternoon, this will allow emergency groups to nominate individuals who participated in the rescue operations at Thredbo for due recognition.

Three of the new awards that I am announcing today are to recognise

- distinguished service by members of the ambulance services
- distinguished service by members of the emergency services; and
- humanitarian service overseas in peacekeeping or hazardous circumstances.

In addition, the Government will put in place new regulations for the National Medal to extend it to members of voluntary search, rescue and emergency services.

The Government believes that the voluntary service provided by volunteer search, rescue and response groups such as at Thredbo, and by bushfire brigades, deserves far better recognition. Their role is essential to the well-being of the community.

My announcement today is in the context of the Government's consideration of the Review of the Australian Honours and Awards (RAHA) which reported to the previous government in 1995. The Government has specifically rejected the advice to abolish the National Medal which recognises long service by members of the Australian police, fire, ambulance, State emergency and other services.

The Government has accepted other RAHA recommendations following consultation with the States and Territories and other key community groups. The Order of Australia is to be retained in its current form as the keystone of the Australian honours system and a major education campaign will be mounted to raise awareness of how it works.

The RAHA recommendations include proposals to improve publicity of the honours system so that all Australians will be encouraged to nominate worthy persons for the Order of Australia and for Australian bravery decorations. I have asked the Minister for Administrative Services, David Jull, to spearhead the publicity activity for the honours system and to take responsibility for raising community awareness. Initiatives are to include the production of user-friendly nomination forms, information kits and launching an internet site on the honours system.