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REPORT TO THE PRIME MINISTER BY THE ADVISORY GROUP ON THE
AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

On 9 February, 1976, you announced that you had asked us to advise you on the role of a Science and Technology Council, its terms of reference, and all other matters concerning its operation.

The Group met on March 3 and March 15, 1976. We now report to you as follows:-

1. Following on your announcement of the formation of the Group, the Minister for Science, the Department of Defence and several other organizations submitted their views in regard to the Science and Technology Council (ASTECC). We believe there are others with a legitimate interest in the outcome of the Government's reexamination of ASTECC who would wish to express views if offered the opportunity. We think that such views should be sought and warrant careful consideration but we were faced with the problem that this process would mean the lapse of several months before we could make a report to you. We understand that you are anxious to receive an early report from us and we ourselves think that an early report is needed because, in the meantime, the Interim Council of ASTECC and its staff are unable to take any initiatives pending a statement of the Government's intentions. The reconciliation of these conflicting thoughts lead us to recommend to you an interim and short term course of action which would bring the members of the Advisory Group into ASTECC. This course is set out in the paragraphs which follow.
2. ASTECC should continue in being with the changes in membership and functions particularised below, but without change of name.
3. As soon as the Council resumes work with a revised membership, the Council should be asked to seek and consider written submissions by interested parties including Government Departments and Agencies, particularly (but not solely) in relation to ASTECC's modus operandi. This should lead to a definitive report by the Council to you before the end of 1976.
4. We recommend that, for the time being, the Council be given as its terms of reference those set out in the press statement from your Office of 8 December 1975, the relevant part of which reads as follows:

"...the Australian Science and Technology Council will be absolutely independent. ASTECC will advise on the whole range of science and technology matters in Government and on the relations between the Government, universities and industry. The Council will be the major independent advisor to Government on such matters as:

- (1) The development and application of science and technology to national needs and objectives.
- (2) New areas of science and technology which are of importance to Australia, including fields of industrially and commercially oriented research and development.
- (3) The balance, adequacy and effectiveness of national efforts in various fields of science and technology, including defence science, and means for improving efficiency in the use of resources.
- (4) The relative importance of efforts in those fields of science and technology which may contribute to national economic and social development and welfare and to the advancement of scientific knowledge.
- (5) The effective development and utilisation of scientific and technological manpower.

As the problems of science involve all areas of Government, and are of the highest importance to Australia, ASTEC will report directly to the Prime Minister who will report to Parliament. The Council will be a body of the highest status and greatest independence."

5. We believe that ad hoc committees and working parties will have to be used for specific tasks if and when the need arises in order to provide a wider range of experience than is possible from within the Council itself. Any reports by these committees should be discussed and approved for publication by the Council. Early publication of Council reports will in many cases be desirable in order to give an opportunity for comments from the scientific and the industrial community before firm decisions on policy are taken by Government. Before establishing a committee or working party the Council should obtain Prime Ministerial approval.
6. In order that the Council may be seen to be as fully independent as is reasonably practicable it should not have a special relationship with any department or ministry having a significant concern with scientific and technological research and development. For this reason we strongly recommend that the Council's Secretariat should be located for the time being within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and that Council should always report directly to the Prime Minister.

7. We consider that the Council's work should take cognizance of the programmes and policies of Commonwealth Government departments and agencies which are concerned with science and technology. We see a need for the Council to be constantly aware of the attitudes and opinions of such Departments. We believe that special arrangements should be made to foster mutual understanding of the work of the Council on the one hand and relevant Government Departments on the other. It is therefore recommended that the Permanent Heads concerned, or their representatives, should be invited to attend all meetings of the Council but without voting rights and without any responsibility for the Council's decisions. They should be able to participate freely in the discussions but be excluded from any presentation of the Council's decisions. These Departments and Agencies, which have a significant research and development budget, are:

Department of Defence
 Department of Health
 Department of National Resources
 Department of Post and Telecommunications
 Department of Science
 and
 C.S.I.R.O.

Other Departments and Agencies should be offered similar opportunities to participate as observers as the need arises.

8. The Council should take care not to engage in work already being handled in other ways, and should inform itself on the activities of other Government bodies dealing with science and technology matters, particularly bodies such as the Minerals Council, the Agricultural Council and the proposed Energy Council which have been established to co-ordinate Commonwealth and State Government policies.
9. We believe that the Council should consult with universities, academies and other relevant bodies with a view to establishing liaison on matters of mutual interest and to avoid duplication of effort. This contact should range from seeking expert advice to requests for studies to be undertaken, but any action involving financial cost should require prior Prime Ministerial approval.
10. Membership: We attach in a covering letter a panel of names for your consideration for membership of the new Interim Council.
11. Since our plan is that a fuller and more definitive report be made to you by the reconstructed Council by the end of 1976 in the expectation that the Government will then make long term decisions in regard to ASTEC, we recommend that the term of office of members of the reconstituted Council should be for one year only.

12. The question of legislation to establish the Council as a statutory body should be left in abeyance until the position is reviewed at the end of 1976.

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