



PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS AT AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY GEEELONG

I am delighted to be with you today. Senator Webster has given you an excellent outline of the purpose of the Australian National Animal Health Laboratory. For my part, I feel very strongly that today marks a significant milestone in the history of Australia's livestock industries - indeed of Australia itself. Since our nation was founded, livestock industries have played a major role in the development and maintenance of Australia's well-being. The CSIRO, since its beginning, has contributed markedly to the welfare of Australia and its vital export industries.

Last financial year exports of Australian livestock products were valued at more than \$2,500 million. This project - the most advanced of its kind in the world - is tangible evidence of the Commonwealth Government's commitment to protect and enhance the well-being of Australia's primary industries.

The start of construction of the Australian National Animal Health Laboratory also speaks, in tangible form, of the Government's continuing commitment to the CSIRO as the nation's leading scientific organisation. The decision to provide \$83 million for this project was not taken lightly. In providing funds, we were conscious of several major factors: Firstly, the dependence Australia has on primary industries for almost half of our export income; secondly, the vulnerable position of livestock industries from the introduction of exotic diseases to Australia. If a disease such as foot and mouth were to become established in Australia, apart from the direct costs of eradication measures, the loss in export trade to overseas markets would be close to \$50 a month. Such a loss would reverberate throughout the entire Australian economy.

The Government, in building this facility, is taking a major step to minimise such losses. Unfortunately, the risks of such diseases entering the country are increasing with greater international movement of people, livestock and livestock products.

In recent years, three exotic diseases affecting horses have been detected in Australia. Emergency action was required to prevent devastation of the poultry industry by fowl plague and a strain of buletongue was discovered in Northern Australia.

The Government's commitment to the construction of the Australian National Animal Health Laboratory forms part of our overall policy of protecting and enhancing the welfare of Australia's primary industries, industries that are vital to our economic future as a nation. During the last three years the Government has initiated a range of measures aimed at improving the viability of rural industries and the communities dependent on them. These measures include: increased funding for local governments and rural roads; the introduction of the investment allowance; assistance for the States for drought relief programmes; the establishment of income equalisation deposits and soon of the Australian Rural Bank; extension of rural reconstruction loans; funding of the Australian Plague Locust Commission; acceleration of brucellosis and tuberculosis eradication in cattle - \$38 million has been provided for this during the past two years; our continuing support of the reserve price for the Australian wool clip; the continuing international negotiations which have led to improved access for primary products to the United States and Japan.

For Australia's hard-pressed beef industry, the Government has introduced specific measures such as the Commonwealth Beef Industry Incentive Payments Scheme. Already \$45 million has been paid direct to producers under this Scheme. In addition, we have allocated \$28 million over the past two years for carry-on loans for beef producers - an allocation that is being matched dollar-for-dollar by State Governments.

The construction of this Laboratory forms part of the Government's overall policy for the protection and development of Australia's primary industries. I am pleased to be with you today at the beginning of construction of the Australian National Animal Health Farm.
