



## PRIME MINISTER

4 April 1978

### REPORTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

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Mr Speaker, for the information of Honourable members, I present two reports of the Australian Science and Technology Council. ("ASTECC").

The first is a report on the activities of the interim ASTEC, which was formed on 29 April 1976 and terminated on 29 March 1977. The second, is a report by the permanent ASTEC, established by the Government in April 1977, on energy research and development in Australia.

The Government is most conscious of the vital need for the future development of Australia, to utilise the nation's science and technology resources efficiently and effectively. As these valuable resources are limited, it is the Government's task to encourage their use rationally and wisely in Australia's best long-term interests.

To assist us in this task, ASTEC has been established as an independent body of the highest quality and standing to advise us on the application of Australian scientific and technological expertise to national problems, and on any other matters relating to science and technology which may be referred to ASTEC, or which it chooses to examine on its own initiative.

The interim ASTEC was re-established by this Government in April 1976 with the principal task of advising on the arrangements for a permanent Australian Science and Technology Council. It presented its report to me in November 1976, and I tabled that Report, and announced the formation of the permanent ASTEC, in the House on 19 April 1977.

The first Report I now table presents details of the other activities of the interim ASTEC during its period of operation. Among the more important of these activities was the advice ASTEC offered on three matters referred to it by the Government in August 1976. These matters were:

Whether Australia should establish facilities to receive information from LANDSAT, the United States of America's earth resources satellite; whether Australia should participate in the first world-wide experiment of the global atmospheric research programme and the extent to which the Commonwealth should be involved in the coordination of information on Australia's unique flora and fauna.

The Government has already taken action on the first two of these questions, our decisions being in line with ASTEC's advice which was of great assistance to us. The third matter is presently being considered by the Government and I expect the Minister for Science to make an announcement on long-term organisational arrangements for biological surveys within the next few months.

ASTEC's advice to the Government on these three matters is reproduced in full in the Report.

Mr Speaker, the second Report I table today is the Report by ASTEC of October last year on Australia's energy research and development needs, a topic which I asked the Council to examine as a matter of high priority.

In preparing its report, the Council received submissions from a wide range of people in the community and was assisted by a number of other recent reports on energy research and development.

In particular, the Council derived useful information from the Report on Solar energy by the Senate Standing Committee on National Resources tabled in May last year, and reports by the Institution of Engineers and the Department of Science referred to in paragraph 1.4 of the Council's Report.

Honourable Members may be aware that on 15 December 1977, the Right Honourable Minister for National Resources released a Report of the National Energy Advisory Committee on a similar topic.

ASTEC's report confirms the assessment of the National Energy Advisory Committee on priorities in energy research and development, and the Committee's views that there is scope for a significant increase in our effort on energy research and development. At the same time, ASTEC's report recommends machinery for the proper coordination of such increased expenditure.

I consider the ASTEC Report on energy to be a most valuable contribution to our planning to meet Australia's future energy demands. The Minister for National Development has derived considerable assistance from the Report in developing proposals to implement the Government's undertaking, announced prior to the elections last November, to expand the energy research and development programme, and to establish a high level body to advise on special measures to administer that programme.

Further details of these matters will be announced by the Minister for National Development in the near future.

Finally, Mr Speaker, for the information of Honourable Members, I should mention that the permanent ASTEC has in the past year provided advice on a number of important matters concerned with Government science including providing comments on various reports submitted to the Government, and consulting with Departments on a number of current issues concerning science and technology.

ASTEC's major activity has been the preparation of a comprehensive review of the state of science and technology in Australia in 1977. This Report is expected to be available by mid-year, and I am confident that it will be a most valuable document in the development of Australia's science and technology policy. It will provide the basis on which ASTEC will formulate its future advice to the Government, and will play an important part in the process of Government decision-making on science and technology.

Mr Speaker, I announced in the House on 19 April 1977 that the Government intended to establish ASTEC as a statutory body to give it the status, permanence and stability required to allow it to undertake its important role in advising the Government on Science and technology. I shall be bringing forward legislation in the present sitting of Parliament to achieve this objective.