



PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS TO THE SECOND INVITATION SYMPOSIUM OF THE AATS 1978

Mr. President, Fellows of the Academy of Technological Sciences, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased indeed to be here tonight and to be able to make a contribution to the Academy's second invitation symposium.

The subject of this symposium - our "Land and Water Resources" - is of major importance to Australia. It warrants the impressive calibre of the speakers the Academy has brought together. There is increasing pressure on us to produce more food, more timber, and more energy from the land available to us - similarly the most uneven distribution and quality of water resources in Australia present us with a constant challenge. The challenge has led to a great deal of effective research and innovation, but from time to time it is necessary to review what we have done so far, and seeking the best and most experienced advice, decide what now needs to be done. I commend the Academy for undertaking this task.

The impact of technology has attracted considerable public attention in the last few months. This must have caused some wry smiles amongst many of you here tonight, for this is hardly a new issue for you. It is important that we respond effectively and sensitively to the rapid spread of technological change in the factory, and in the office. Although adapting to technological change can be a difficult process, innovations in technology are the cornerstone of social and industrial development - and have given rise to the living standards enjoyed by advanced industrial societies. Technology, when progressively developed, increases the returns from our people, from our natural resources, from all our assets. Technological advance in industry means improvements in productivity, downward pressure on the overall cost structure, a more competitive Australian economy. The adoption of new technology permits the continued improvement of our standard of living and creates opportunities for employment through the expansion of existing industries and the creation of new ones.

Australia has an enormous technological potential. We have vast resources. Our people are well-educated and creative, our science and scientists have reached high levels of sophistication and achieved significant recognition in the world community of science. No one can doubt the outstanding contributions our scientists have made.

I should, however, say that this record is not always matched by the application of the knowledge our scientists develop, or to which they have access. We have not advanced our technologies to the same extent as some of our developed trading partners, nor have we always responded as well as we might to the needs of the market place. The recent ASTEC report, "Science and Technology in Australia 1977-78" for instance, suggests that our record could be better in developing the results that come from research, and translating these into technological innovations in industry. If we are to apply knowledge in the pursuit of our industrial and other national objectives, we must continue to increase and strengthen the national technological base. We should be concerned with the recognition given to technologists who are people of the utmost importance in Australia. Too often, technologists have been seen as following a lesser occupation, a lesser profession than that of research scientists. But the effort, the ability, the creative skills required in technological innovation are of the same order as those of the scientist.

Technologists have a great part to play in Australia's development and the foundation of this Academy is an appropriate recognition of that fact. To emphasise technology and technologists however is not to de-emphasise science. Technology and science interact, and the more we can understand and manage this interaction, the more practical benefits the community will derive from Australian scientific and technological expertise. It is essential that our organisational arrangements reflect this basic need and that the closest links and cooperation be forged between Government Departments, Government research institutions, industry and the academic world.

When my Government came to office, we embarked on a major strategy to achieve this. We knew it was essential that Australian industry expand into new areas, based on Australian expertise and innovation, and using to the full the advantage which our vast natural resources give us. Our objective was to provide industry with better opportunities to seize on new knowledge, to turn it to use, in improving existing products and processes - in generating new product lines, and in increasing our exports to tap the growing overseas markets particularly in our region.

Elements of our strategy have been the establishment of a permanent Australian Science and Technology Council; a comprehensive review of C.S.I.R.O.; the establishment of the Department of Productivity; a review of Government policy on manufacturing industry; the creation of the Bureau of Industry Economics - and the commissioning of a number of specialist studies, notably the Crawford and Williams Enquiries. Together, these initiatives constitute a dynamic offensive designed to encourage Australian industry to use more effectively modern science and technology

Let me now say a few words about a couple of developments which illustrate the success of this strategy. The invention of Interscan, which has been adopted as the new world standard for aircraft landing systems, has been widely recognised as a significant Australian achievement.

Work has commenced on a new project designed to make sure that Australian industry obtains a commercial benefit from Interscan and a new company, "Interscan Australia" has been set up for this purpose.

The Department of Productivity is also currently developing proposals on a "public interest project" which should be of particular interest to this Symposium. The essence of the proposals is that Australian companies be awarded contracts to develop and demonstrate water treatment systems based on technology resulting from research by CSIRO and Australian companies to convert brackish and turbid water into good quality drinking water. If we can develop a unique capability in the design and construction of such treatment systems, we can greatly improve the quality of water in many parts of our nation and open up immense prospects for Australian exports to the dry regions of the Middle East and Africa.

The Government has taken these various initiatives because it is convinced that the development and application of technology will contribute significantly to the prosperity and living conditions of all Australians.

Ladies and gentlemen, Australians have every reason for confidence in the future. With a more stable cost base, we are competitive again, and we are getting our manufactures back into world markets. I believe that the next decade will be years in which our industries will thrive and expand in a highly competitive and changing world. This is a time in which we can look forward as a nation because we can capture the future.

By working together, we will make our industries - Primary, Secondary and Tertiary - as modern and efficient as possible, and make the most productive use of the skilled labour available to us. We must do more than merely articulate the advantages that technology brings. We must develop the most effective balance between the use of existing technology, its adaption to Australian conditions and the creation of new technology. We must all think positively about the ways we perform our various tasks and the techniques by which our efficiency of production and quality of service might be improved.

In our response to change, your first President, Sir Ian McLennan, by his constant application to the ever-evolving challenges facing Australia, can serve as an outstanding example for us all. In reaching out to grasp the opportunities that are constantly becoming more apparent, the commitment and concerted efforts of all Australians is vital. We seek the co-operation and effort of all Governments - Commonwealth and State - with industry, scientists and technologists throughout Australia.

We will realise the promise the next decade holds out by forging a partnership between Government and the community. With such a partnership, there is nothing we cannot achieve as a nation.

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