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AUSTRALIA

PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

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SILVER JUBILEE
OF
AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

It is a great pleasure to be with you today, the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Australian Academy of Science. The Jubilee comes at a critical time. The world is in the midst of a scientific revolution, a revolution which is changing the organisation of society as profoundly as the industrial revolution changed the world which preceded it.

The pessimists see science and technology as juggernauts out of control. The optimists look forward to an age of well-being unprecedented in human history. Proper understanding by the community of science and technology is essential if we are to make the most of this revolution.

Organised bodies of scientists, like the Australian Academy of Science, therefore have special responsibilities not only for the promotion of excellence in science, but for promotion of scientific understanding in the community at large.

The Academy, which was founded in 1954 with the support of the Commonwealth Government, under Sir Robert Menzies, has accepted a number of responsibilities on behalf of scientists and science in Australia. The Academy's charter, confered by Queen Elizabeth, laid down the major formal responsibilities for the Academy, which were "to promote, declare and disseminate scientific knowledge, to establish and maintain standards of scientific endeavour and achievement..".

These Jubilee celebrations are a reaffirmation of its dedication to these responsibilities, and a time to look back on the Academy's 25 years of achievements. They are also a time to pause and look ahead towards the next 25 years and the role of such an Academy in those promising but difficult times.

The Academy has met its obligations well. It has acted as the able representative of Australian science in international affairs and has promoted bilateral exchanges, notably with the People's Republic of China. It has brought many overseas scientists to Australia, particularly by its organisation of international conferences. It has participated in events like the International Geophysical Year, and supported the proposal for a large optical telescope in Australia, which led eventually

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to the Anglo-Australian agreement to jointly build and operate a 3.9 metre telescope. It has interpreted the promotion of scientific knowledge, not only in relation to scientific excellence in the narrow technical sense but in the wider community sense. It has conducted, and published, inquiries concerned with topics as diverse as hydrology, Antarctic research, solar energy, fats in the diet, national parks, climatic change, and the quality of the environment.

The Academy has conducted national workshops, and has standing committees in areas both of scientific and public interest. It has made submissions to Government inquiries and provided technical advice. The discussions which ultimately led to the Australian Science and Technology Council were initiated by the Academy in 1967 with a report entitled "Science Policy Machinery in Australia", and ASTEC is now headed by a former President of the Academy, Professor Geoffrey Badger.

In this age of great opportunity and of challenge for the world and for Australia we must be in the forefront of acquiring scientific knowledge and converting this knowledge to practical effect.

Our scientists have made outstanding contributions to their discipline. The quality of Australian science stands high on any measure, whether it be the prizes and honours conferred, the scientific outputs, the reputations and prestige of our research institutes and research schools. But we need to do more to match this record with success in the application of our scientific knowledge. Sometimes our scientists, our technologists, our businessmen, do not communicate and build on each other's talents as much as we would have hoped.

The recent ASTEC Report "Science and Technology in Australia, 1977-78" for instance, suggests that we could have done more to capitalise on the output of Australian research and use the results as the basis for technological innovations in our industries.

The Government would like to see Australia's scientists improve their links with the rest of the Australian community. Close contact should be established between Government departments, research institutions, industry and the academic world. My Government's strategy has been designed to achieve this, and we have instituted a permanent Australian Science and Technology Council, a comprehensive review of the CSIRO, and a number of other measures such as our programmes to determine the most effective means of obtaining the benefits of new technology.

The Academy has, for its part, been promoting the applications of science in industry through its standing committee, the"Science and Industry Forum". The Forum is valuable, not only for its inquiries and published reports, but because it brings together scientists, technologists and managers to exchange points of view.

Understanding the changes which science may bring about requires education at various levels and the Academy has given attention to this important aspect of science.

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The activities associated with the Jubilee provide a picture of some of the more general ways which the community can gain an understanding of scientific developments. They include sponsorship of a school science exhibition, and an essay competition on "science and society", public lectures on topics like technology and employment, and conservation, a young people's symposium, the showing of scientific films, and the admirable exhibition in this building. They are to be followed by a series of scientific symposia intended to make use of the Academy's broad representation over the whole of science. Shortly, with the close co-operation of the sister academies of technology and of the social sciences a two-day workshop "Science and Technology for Development" will be held.

The Academy, over the last 25 years, has most creditably acquitted its responsibilities and has made important contributions to national goals and aspirations. What of the next 25 years? The distinguished scientists who are members of the Academy must continue with their special role in the development of Australia. They have a role in stimulating scientific discoveries and a role in continuing to bring science to the Australian people.

The Academy is also well placed to make a major contribution in advising the Government, for example, by contributing to the Committee of Inquiry into Technological Change in Australia, which is being chaired by Professor Rupert Myers. Although partly supported by a Government grant the Academy is an independent body.

In a democracy such as ours, there is always a need for independent identification and investigation of problems. Independence ensures that the Academy will put forward considered, constructive advice and the Government looks forward to the future contributions by the Academy.

I hope that the Academy will continue to interpret its Charter very broadly, to the advantage both of science in Australia and the whole Australian community. I congratulate the Academy on its past record and wish it well for the next 25 years.

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