



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH PREPARED FOR THE PRIME MINISTER, MR R.J.L. HAWKE,
AT THE INAUGURAL PRESENTATION OF AWARD FOR THE BEST DEPARTMENTAL
ANNUAL REPORT
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
23 MAY 1983

I AM SURE IT'S A GOOD OMEN THAT RELATIVELY EARLY
IN THE LIFE OF MY GOVERNMENT, I SHOULD HAVE THE PLEASURE
OF MAKING THE INAUGURAL PRESENTATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN
INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S AWARD FOR THE BEST
ANNUAL REPORT PRODUCED BY A COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT.

IT IS A CONCEPT VERY MUCH IN LINE WITH MY
GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO A WIDER AND FULLER SHARING OF
INFORMATION WITH THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA.

NEVERTHELESS THERE'S A CERTAIN IRONY ABOUT THE
FACT THAT DEPARTMENTAL ANNUAL REPORTS SHOULD BE DEEMED WORTHY
OF A PRIZE IN 1983 - MORE THAN EIGHTY YEARS AFTER FEDERATION.

IT IS ALMOST AS IF, TO QUOTE DR JOHNSON IN
ANOTHER CONTEXT: "THE SURPRISING THING IS NOT THAT IT IS
DONE WELL, BUT THAT IT IS DONE AT ALL."

IT IS REALLY QUITE ASTONISHING TO REFLECT HOW RECENTLY THE PRODUCTION OF AN ANNUAL REPORT HAS BECOME THE NORMAL PRACTICE FOR MANY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS.

IN 1976, LESS THAN TEN YEARS AGO, THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION FOUND IT NECESSARY TO EXTOL THE VIRTUES OF THE 'DEVELOPING PRACTICE' AMONG DEPARTMENTS OF PREPARING SUCH REPORTS.

MY OWN DEPARTMENT'S FIRST ANNUAL REPORT WAS PRESENTED TO THE PARLIAMENT IN 1979 - A MERE SEVENTY-THREE YEARS AFTER PRIME MINISTER DEAKIN REQUESTED IT.

HOWEVER, THE PRACTICE NOW SEEMS TO BE FIRMLY ENTRENCHED, AND I WELCOME IT, BOTH AS A PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE, AND AS AN AID TO THOSE INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS WHO WANT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE WAY THEY ARE GOVERNED.

IN TALKING OF ACCOUNTABILITY, IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT WHILE DEPARTMENTS PROVIDE SERVICES TO AND HAVE DIRECT DEALINGS WITH THE PUBLIC, THEY ARE DIRECTLY AND IMMEDIATELY ACCOUNTABLE TO THEIR MINISTERS.

BEFORE WE CAME INTO OFFICE, I THINK I MADE IT FAIRLY CLEAR HOW I EXPECTED ACCOUNTABILITY TO MINISTERS TO OPERATE, BUT I BELIEVE IT IS WORTH REINFORCING, PARTICULARLY IN THIS FORUM, WHAT I HAVE ALREADY SAID ON THIS POINT.

AS A GOVERNMENT, WE EXPECT LOYALTY FROM THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN PUTTING OUR POLICIES INTO EFFECT.

BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE DO NOT SEEK HONEST AND FORTHRIGHT ADVICE IN DEVELOPING THOSE POLICIES.

I SHOULD BE VERY DISTURBED TO THINK THAT ANY PUBLIC SERVANT WOULD HESITATE IN GIVING ME OR MY MINISTERS A FRANK AND FORTHRIGHT OPINION ON A PROPOSAL.

THE CONSTRUCTIVE AND CREATIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS THAT WE WANT TO CULTIVATE WITH THE PUBLIC SERVICE WOULD BE IRREPARABLY STUNTED WERE PUBLIC SERVANTS TO FEEL THE NEED TO TEMPER THEIR ADVICE BY ANY CONSIDERATION OF ITS UNPALATABILITY OR UNPOPULARITY.

WE NO LONGER EXECUTE THE BEARER OF BAD NEWS.

BY THE SAME TOKEN IF ADVICE IS NOT ACCEPTED, MINISTERS HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPECT THAT THE POLICY THEY DECIDE ON WILL BE LOYALLY AND DILIGENTLY PURSUED BY THEIR DEPARTMENTS. THAT IS THE WHOLE BASIS OF AN INDEPENDENT, PROFESSIONAL SERVICE.

I UNDERSTAND THAT, IN MAKING ITS SELECTION FOR THIS AWARD, THE JUDGING PANEL WAS ASKED TO GIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE USE OF ANNUAL REPORTS AS A VEHICLE FOR MAKING AVAILABLE MATERIAL THAT MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE BE MADE PUBLIC AS A MATTER OF COURSE.

I HOPE THIS ASPECT DID PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART IN THEIR DELIBERATIONS, BECAUSE IT IS AN IDEA THAT IS INTEGRAL TO THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO A MORE OPEN AND RESPONSIBLE STYLE OF GOVERNMENT IN AUSTRALIA.

ONE ASPECT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S WIDER COMMITMENT TO OPEN GOVERNMENT WAS ILLUSTRATED RECENTLY IN RELATION TO THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT.

BEFORE AND DURING THE SUMMIT, INFORMATION WAS MADE FREELY AVAILABLE ABOUT THE ECONOMIC PROJECTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS ON WHICH DISCUSSION WAS TO BE FOCUSED.

AT THE TIME OF THE MEETING, THE PROCEEDINGS WERE WIDELY BROADCAST; AND THE RECORD OF THE WHOLE OF THE SUMMIT DELIBERATIONS IS BEING MADE AVAILABLE, IN PRINT AND ON TAPES, TO ANYONE WHO WISHES TO BUY THEM OR TO BORROW THEM FROM A LIBRARY.

MY COLLEAGUES AND I WERE DEEPLY IMPRESSED BY THE WAY THE PUBLIC SERVANTS WE WORKED WITH BEFORE AND DURING THE SUMMIT EMBRACED THE PRINCIPLES OF OPENNESS, KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING WE WISHED TO ESTABLISH.

I HOPE THAT THEIR ENTHUSIASTIC AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR WISHES IN RESPECT OF COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE SUMMIT WILL FORESHADOW A NEW SPIRIT IN THE FLOW OF INFORMATION BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT, THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE COMMUNITY.

INFORMATION ABOUT GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS IS NOT, AFTER ALL, SOME KIND OF 'FAVOUR' TO BE BESTOWED BY A BENEVOLENT GOVERNMENT - OR TO BE EXTORTED FROM A RELUCTANT BUREAUCRACY. IT IS, QUITE SIMPLY, A PUBLIC RIGHT.

THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA HAVE A RIGHT TO INFORM THEMSELVES FULLY - SUBJECT TO THE NORMAL PROTECTIONS - ABOUT THE WAY THOSE THEY HAVE ELECTED TO GOVERN THEM DISCHARGE THAT RESPONSIBILITY.

WE, AS A GOVERNMENT, ARE COMMITTED TO SEEING THAT THIS RIGHT IS RESPECTED; AND TO PROMOTING PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES THAT WILL HONOUR OUR OBLIGATIONS IN THIS RESPECT.

BY ENCOURAGING STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE IN THE PRODUCTION OF ANNUAL REPORTS - THE MINIMUM STARTING POINT FOR A PUBLIC INFORMATION EFFORT BY ANY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT - THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IS ECHOING THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN TO ACHIEVE THE HIGHEST STANDARD IN THIS VERY IMPORTANT AREA OF ADMINISTRATION.

I CONGRATULATE THE INSTITUTE ON ITS INITIATIVE IN INSTITUTING THIS AWARD, AND I CONGRATULATE THE WINNING DEPARTMENT ON ITS ACHIEVEMENT.
