CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY   AUSTRALIA   EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY
                                                     10 a.m.

PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER
AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL OFFICE
1983/84 EDUCATION AND ENROLMENT CAMPAIGN
MELBOURNE - 14 OCTOBER 1983

Few Australians will have forgotten how the precipitate closure of the electoral rolls before the last election effectively disenfranchised nearly 200,000 of our fellow Australians.

In one fell swoop he deprived many of those who had suffered most from the policies of his Government of their right to vote.

The closure of the electoral rolls within an hour of the last Parliament being dissolved was a cynical act, totally at odds with the democratic traditions of this country.

It did, however, serve one useful purpose.

It drew attention to the large number of eligible Australian's who had failed to register to vote.

That number continues to be unacceptably high.

A recent Australian Electoral Office survey indicated that between 500,000 and 600,000 eligible Australian residents have failed to register to vote.

We cannot afford to shrug this situation aside.

Full and effective participation by all Australian's in our political system is necessary to the health of that system and, ultimately, to the achievement of strong, effective and truly representative Government.

We should all be concerned that so many fail to enrol, to vote, and to exercise their right to participate in our system of parliamentary democarcy.

Already we have moved to simplify the procedures involved.

The new plain English enrolment forms are a distinct improvement on those previously used.

But it is especially disturbing that behind this failure to exercise basic democratic rights and responsibilities - a failure heavily concentrated among our young people - lies an appalling ignorance, apathy and cynicism.

Quite apart from widespread ignorance of enrolment procedures, an Australian Electoral Office survey recently found an almost universal lack of confidence among young, unenrolled Australians that their vote has any significant impact on government, the Parliament, the bureaucracy and their own lives.

As a Government we aim to reverse this situation - to provide information, motivation and reason, where now there is ignorance, apathy and cynicism.

Every Australain has a role to play in the Government of this country.

Every Australian must be able to feel represented in Parliament and must be able to feel that he or she has confidence in the democratic and parliamentary process.

We politicians have a particular responsibility in this regard.

We must, as Kim Beazley put it in the House recently, earn credibility through performance; through our policies and actions we have to show
                    - that a vote is a worthwhile and meaningful exercise.

I am especially pleased that Alan Griffiths, the Member for Maribyrnong is with us today. As the youngest Member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on electoral reform and as one of the youngest Members of the House of Representatives, he has a particular appreciation of the issues involved in this campaign.

I expect him both on the Government's and my own behalf and within the constraints of his own already heavy schedule of commitments to be active in carrying this exercise forward.

The campaign we are launching today is crucial.

It also, despite the background of the pre-election situation, has the support of both sides of politics.

Mr Steel Hall's recent suggestion that the campaign be bipartisan - a suggestion made in resonse to Mr Beazley's invitation to Members from both sides of the House to join together in explaining the aims and purposes of the campaign - is welcome.

We look forward to the Opposition getting behind this effort.

Surprisingly our campaign is unprecedented.

Costing $3.35 million, it is a sophisticated, carefully integrated education and information exercise directed not just at the unenrolled but to all Australians.

Without exception we owe it to ourselves and to our society that we all know and exercise our electoral rights and responsibilities.

In this sense this campaign is one which not only should succeed - it must succeed.

* *