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PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF THE FESTIVAL OF PACIFIC ARTS
TOWNSVILLE - 15 AUGUST 1988**

All Australians and particularly those who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent can feel proud to be hosting the 5th Festival of Pacific Arts.

For 16 years since 1972, this Festival has provided a unique showcase for the cultures of the Pacific region - a forum for traditional skills and a means of showing new directions being taken in response to the opportunities and challenges of the 20th Century.

Previous Festivals of Pacific Art have been hosted by Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tahiti.

This year Australia is pleased to play its part as Festival host

- not just because of the historical links and the continuing friendship between Australians and the people of the Pacific;
- not just because of the importance of the close economic ties between us;
- but especially because of the pride we take in the culture of the original Australians, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, whose cultural achievements will be so much in evidence during this festival.

It is true, but a matter for regret, to say that many non-Aboriginal Australians have failed to recognise and appreciate the wealth and richness of this original culture until relatively recently. The chasm between the original inhabitants of this continent and the Europeans who arrived 200 years ago was too wide to be bridged easily or quickly.

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In recent decades, however, there has been an enormous explosion of interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures - not only in Australia but overseas as well. It is my hope that this Festival will act as another catalyst in promoting greater appreciation and understanding among contemporary Australians of this 40,000 year old culture.

This Festival promises to be a memorable celebration of the song and dance, the drama and storytelling, the traditional craft and the contemporary film making of the cultures of the Pacific region - providing vivid evidence, if any were needed, of the resilience, dignity and vigour of these cultures.

Some 1800 performing artists are in Townsville for this Festival. All of you are welcome to Australia and to Townsville. My Government is proud to be associated with this Festival and to have provided assistance to bring it into being.

I personally am delighted to be with you today and to wish you success and satisfaction in your performances and displays.
