



PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
AUSTRALIAN QUALITY AWARDS
MELBOURNE - 8 NOVEMBER 1989

Allan Moyes,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In your introductory comments, Allan, you referred to that most dramatic of processes taking place in Australia today: the redefinition of Australia's role in the changing world.

I think everyone here, from no matter what industry or policy sector, finds common ground in the assertion of the fundamental importance of that process of redefinition.

Earlier this week, with the successful conclusion to the first Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting, we not only saw dramatic evidence that this redefinition is taking place; we also got a clear indication of the direction in which we are moving to take up the challenge of global change.

I confess I am delighted at the outcome of the APEC meeting.

This was the first time that twelve economies of the dynamic region of which Australia is part had met, as a region, to discuss the scope for closer economic cooperation in the region.

Naturally I'm pleased to have initiated the process that brought so many senior ministers to Canberra for such a productive meeting.

But more importantly, I believe it's important for all Australians - and it's certainly important for anyone committed to improving the quality of Australian products and services - that this forum, essentially experimental and unprecedented in nature, has laid such promising foundations for future cooperation in the Asia Pacific region.

The meeting identified a number of specific areas of future possible cooperation and also agreed, as you know, to reconvene first in Singapore and then in the Republic of Korea. Very importantly, it agreed on a meeting of regional Trade Ministers to be held in the context of the Uruguay round of trade talks.

What these meetings mean - or more precisely, what the spirit underlying them means - is that there is a widespread determination to work together so as to maximise the opportunities for further growth and enhanced prosperity throughout the Asia Pacific Region - including, not least, Australia.

What I want to stress this evening is that, from Australia's point of view, international diplomatic efforts such as the strengthening of regional cooperation go hand in hand with the domestic effort, even the enterprise-level effort, to improve the quality of our production of goods and services.

All the attempts that the Government makes on the international front to improve our economic well-being - such as in APEC, and in the Cairns Group of fair trading nations that has been pushing for a liberalisation of world trade - will be weakened if in our domestic economic arrangements and attitudes we fail to recognise the importance of improving efficiency and productivity.

In an interdependent world, there are almost limitless opportunities for Australia to grow through enmeshment with the Asia-Pacific region - through trade, investment, tourism, education links. But by the same token these opportunities can only be fully realised if there is a preparedness in domestic terms to be flexible, to restructure outmoded economic institutions, to abandon outmoded and inefficient work and management practices, and to implement, with determination, our commitment to quality.

That is why I am delighted to be here tonight to present once more the Australian Quality Awards, and why I congratulate Enterprise Australia for its hard work and its vision that has drawn attention, through these Awards, to the critical issue of quality.

What we have seen over the last six and a half years - and what the concept of the Australian Quality Awards recognises - is a comprehensive and effective program of reform to make Australia a more efficient, more productive and therefore more prosperous place.

What we must develop is a strong and vigorous export culture.

That, fundamentally, is the economic rationale behind Australia's multilateral diplomacy in APEC and the Cairns Group.

That is the rationale behind the massive tariff cuts we have made.

That is why we support AUSTRADE and provide other export assistance measures.

That is why we have embarked on the nation's first sweeping program of micro-economic reform, recognising that change is required not only in export and import-competing industries, but also in the industries that supply them with inputs, and also in the infrastructure by which goods and services are moved within Australia.

And it is that same goal - the development of an export culture - that is behind our support for the massively important strategy of award restructuring.

Award restructuring provides the necessary flexibility to allow companies to take advantage of new technology and production processes and to remove restrictive work and management practices.

This can only contribute to the development of corporate spirit and identity, which in turn fosters increased productivity and pride of workmanship.

In other words, it helps increase the quality of the goods and services we produce and thus improve the international reputation of Australian products.

I have said the development of our export culture - or, to refer back to Allan's phrase, the redefinition of Australia's role in the world - is a comprehensive program.

It involves us all.

Not least, it requires managers to rethink the way they have gone about their job and to consider their contribution to the production process.

The Quality movement led by Enterprise Australia is dedicated to training managers in techniques that will raise the productivity and competitiveness of Australian industry - not just improving the quality of the finished product, but emphasising the importance of quality at every stage of the production process.

The introduction of these quality control production techniques is not, it seems, without cost. In fact, a common experience appears to be that costs increase. But the point is that increased costs are at least offset by the increased value of the higher quality finished goods.

- and in a world where competition is as much about quality as it is about price, that is no small achievement.

It is very pleasing to note that the quality of the applications for the Awards this year has improved significantly - and that the evaluation criteria used by the judges has also been correspondingly tightened.

I'm looking forward to announcing who has won these awards and to congratulating them for their fine achievements.

But I think we would all agree that our vision for a more export-oriented Australia, for an Australia that has successfully redefined its role in the world, will not be complete until all Australians, and not just the winners and finalists of these Awards, have accepted in their day to day work the paramount need for and desirability of quality.

I thank the organisers for their contribution tonight, I congratulate the winners for their success, and I commend the Quality movement for its constructive effort in pursuing this vital national goal.
