



PRIME MINISTER

83/92

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
GENETICALLY ENGINEERED EUCALYPTS**

I am pleased today to congratulate the CSIRO on the development of a genetically engineered eucalyptus tree.

CSIRO scientists successfully transferred a gene from a bacterium into cells from red gum. Each "transgenic" cell has already re-generated into a young river red gum, growing in sterile conditions in a laboratory.

Genes have been transferred successfully into other plant species, but this is the first scientifically confirmed genetic transfer into the river red gum.

The harmless bacterial gene transferred into the gum tree by the CSIRO's Divisions of Forestry and Plant Industry is simply a "marker" to show that the technology works.

Next, the scientists plan to repeat these experiments using two temperate eucalypts (*Eucalyptus nitens* and *globulus*) both of which are important commercial plantation trees in Australia.

As an environmental safety measure, the next step is to genetically engineer sterile plantation trees. Once this has been achieved, there will be no risk that unwanted genes might spread into native forests. The CSIRO's "gene shears" technology, which switches off unwanted genes, will be used as part of the sterility program.

The development of transformation systems and sterility would then allow for changes in important economic properties, such as pest resistance and high density wood.

The genetically engineered trees will not be able to breed, so they will have to be propagated by laboratory cloning. Scientists will be able to choose the best plantation specimens and produce large numbers of these elite trees.

The transformed trees are growing under secure laboratory conditions, and it will be some time before plants are available or officially approved for field testing.

I am also pleased today to declare open new laboratories for the CSIRO's Division of Forestry, and to launch the Co-operative Research Centre for Temperate Hardwood Forestry in Hobart.

The new research centre, one of 50 such centres throughout Australia, brings together scientists from several institutions and from the forestry industry to tackle common research problems.

HOBART
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