



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP

LABOR SUPPORTS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Labor Government recognises science, technology and engineering as fundamental to a growing economy, a clean environment and a world class health system.

The Government has an important role to play in supporting Australian science, not only through funding for basic research in universities, but by encouraging a long-term commitment from our business sector.

Labor has a proud record of support for Australian science. Since 1982-83 funding has increased to \$2.9 billion per year, a 39% increase in real terms. The 1992-93 Budget included the fourth successive real increase.

We are committed to building on this record in order to make the most of our clever ideas and thereby underpin our growing international competitiveness.

We will continue to support the national science effort through commitment to institutions such as the CSIRO. The CSIRO is more than a scientific research agency. Like the ABC, it is a national icon. It plays an important role in preserving the nation's heritage, encouraging ideas and strengthening national cohesion.

We will also continue to support our high quality health and medical research system. Since 1982-83, Commonwealth funding of this important area has more than doubled in real terms. The results, in terms of research which improves the health of all Australians, have been outstanding. Labor will work with medical researchers and the business sector to lift research funding to 2.0% of total health expenditure by the year 2000. The National Health and Medical Research Council's Research Strategy will be important in helping the Government achieve this goal.

Labor recognises that science involves a long-term investment. Funding cannot be turned on and off like a tap. It is for these reasons that the Government made the 150% R&D tax concession a permanent part of the tax system, introduced and extended the Cooperative Research Centres program and will continue indefinitely university research infrastructure funding beyond 1994.

While Labor will invest substantially in the nation's technological future, the Coalition will cut research funding. According to Fightback, \$20 million will be slashed from the science budget.

The importance of science and technology was completely ignored by Dr Hewson in his campaign launch.

Dr Hewson should recognise the importance of science and engineering, and the need for continuing government support. He must:

- pledge to maintain current levels of science funding and resist from the cuts proposed in Fightback;

- match Labor's commitments of \$52 million per year for higher education research infrastructure and \$25 million per year for ten new Cooperative Research Centres.

The Coalition has failed to demonstrate either an understanding of or sympathy with the needs and aspirations of Australia's scientists and engineers. By contrast, Labor has worked hard to give science, technology and engineering a stronger role in Australia's future. It understands their importance and will continue to support them accordingly.

CANBERRA
4 MARCH 1993