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PRIME MINISTER

49/93

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

VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND

At the invitation of Prime Minister Bolger, I shall make an official visit to New Zealand from 20 to 23 May.

The visit will provide a valuable opportunity to reaffirm the relevance and vitality of the Australia-New Zealand relationship at a time when both countries are undergoing significant economic and social change, and as we position ourselves to take full advantage of closer integration with the Asia-Pacific region.

It is fitting that New Zealand should be the destination of my first overseas visit since the March election. The trans-Tasman relationship is among Australia's most important reflecting the weight of the interests and values we share with New Zealand.

Two-way trade between the two countries has grown rapidly since the signing of the Australia-New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement (CER) in 1983 and reached over \$5 billion in 1991-92. New Zealand is Australia's third largest trading partner, and Australia is New Zealand's largest. Investment between Australia and New Zealand has also grown rapidly to reach a two-way total of about \$13.5 billion in 1991.

Increasing interaction between the Australian and New Zealand economies provides a sound basis for the two countries to compete successfully in the wider international economy. Creating a single market in Australasia under CER should not be an end in itself. Rather the CER process should be used as a platform for both countries to engage more closely with the dynamic Asia-Pacific region.

The strength of the bilateral relationship is also reflected in the scale of people-to-people contacts between the two countries. Over 800,000 Australians and New Zealanders travelled across the Tasman on short-term visits in 1991. Australia is the largest source of visitors to New Zealand, and New Zealand ranks third as a source of visitors to Australia. Nearly 290,000 New Zealanders are long-term residents of Australia.

I expect the agenda for my discussions with Prime Minister Bolger and his Ministers will be wide ranging and include the further development of our substantial economic relationship, trans-Tasman aviation and travel arrangements, defence relations, our respective approaches to closer economic integration with the Asia-Pacific region, and Australia-New Zealand cooperation in the South-West Pacific.

CANBERRA
13 April 1993