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PRIME MINISTER

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UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE TAKES EFFECT

I welcome the commencement today, Monday 21 March, of the United Nations Climate Change Convention.

This marks the beginning of the next phase of concerted international action to mitigate the potentially adverse effects of climate change.

Australia shares the genuine concern of other countries about this major issue, a concern reflected in the extraordinarily speedy negotiation of this convention.

Parties to the convention will act within their own boundaries and share in actions extending beyond national borders.

Scientific and economic research, limits on greenhouse gas emissions, education and information programs, and planning for any possible adverse effects of climate change will make up a large part of the world's concerted action.

Australia's response recognises that action must take place within the framework of a sustainable Australian economy and a competitive trade position, as well as protecting the environment.

Australia has been a leader in this field. We were among the first nations to develop and begin implementing an action plan, the National Greenhouse Response Strategy.

The State and Territory Governments co-operated with the Commonwealth Government in developing a national Strategy that allows for change within the context of changing international conditions.

It is significant that parties to the UN Convention agree to review their commitments in the light of the best scientific and economic information until the objective of the Convention is met. More is being done in Australia than the original Strategy demanded, and more will be done.

Since the Strategy was adopted in 1992, the Commonwealth has developed an inventory of greenhouse gases, adopted a guaranteed excise-free period

for alternative fuels, and initiated a study of the opportunities and strategies for a biomass-derived energy industry.

At the recent Council of Australian Governments in Hobart, the States and Territories agreed to work for national markets in gas and electricity that will be more competitive. By increasing efficiency in generating energy, such markets will reduce the nation's demand for new generating capacity and thereby provide for more responsible use of finite resources of fossil fuels.

This Government has always recognised the environmental and economic interests at stake in climate change.

Australia will continue to be actively involved in future negotiations, and will continue to protect and advance those interests.

CANBERRA
20 March 1994