



# PRIME MINISTER

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

**RECEPTION FOR DIRECTORS OF COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRES  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, 19 APRIL 1994**

This exhibition, which is being mounted in conjunction with the 1994 CRC Directors' meeting, gives me the opportunity to underline my continuing support and that of the government for the work of the scientific community, and in particular for the Cooperative Research Centres program.

Over the past few months, the government has been considering the central role industry policy must play in shaping our future as a nation.

A vital thread in this is the importance of innovation, which will provide the only sustainable growth available. Innovation in technology, science and engineering are central to this process.

Australia comes out well in any international comparison on government investment in science. Past investment has provided a rich human and institutional resource base for us to build on.

The creation of my Science and Engineering Council indicates my own commitment to the development of Australia's science and technology. A further indication has been my recent decision to include science and technology in Peter Cook's Cabinet portfolio.

The main problem we face is under investment in R&D by the private sector. Although we have in the past decade had the highest growth rate in the OECD in business funding of R&D, there is still a way to go to match our main competitors. Government programs for science and innovation, such as tax concessions for R&D, are supporting the move by the business community to meet this challenge.

But we must remember that our competitors do not stand still. Our innovation support programs will continue to be monitored and fine-tuned to maintain their effectiveness. Most recently, we have been giving increased attention

to the ways in which we can encourage innovation in small to medium sized enterprises. But there is no reason for large companies to rest on their laurels.

We must also capitalise on the very considerable investment and expertise that lies within our public sector research institutes by linking them more closely with those of industry and attuning them to the market place.

The Cooperative Research Centres program is an important part of our plans to improve the commercialisation of research results.

The government is expecting that the Australian Technology Group established late last year will also enable us to make significant steps forward in this area. I know that the CRCs will be looking to forge strong links with the ATG and will take advantage of its areas of specialist expertise.

We need to consider whether we are making best use of all the resources available in our research labs. Women with science skills are a particularly underused resource. If we cannot involve women in the national pursuit of innovation and competitiveness, we are not managing our human resources efficiently. There is room for improvement in both public and private sectors.

As directors of CRCs, those present today may be in a unique position to develop and promote science skill development, irrespective of history and gender. I hope you can also promote an increased role for women in industry research, which has been very much a male preserve.

The pioneering CRCs are now in their third year. Tonight's exhibition gives just a glimpse of some of the many achievements which they are beginning to record in fields as diverse as aerospace structures, photonics, and tropical plant pathology. These achievements have also been demonstrated in the presentations made by CRCs to my Science and Engineering Council.

As I have stressed, innovation is essential to Australia's future. So the linkages being developed by the CRC program between public and private sector research are essential. CRCs have introduced a new kind of multi-cultural approach to research, linking industry, academia and the public sector.

CRC participants include business enterprises, universities, and government agencies including the CSIRO. These participants have agreed to contribute more than \$1,500 million over the expected life of the existing 51 centres. This amount includes nearly \$350 million from business enterprises. Their total contributions are equivalent to approximately \$2 for every \$1 of Commonwealth funds. Over 200 companies are associated with CRCs in various ways, many of them as formal participants. The success of the program depends on the participation of both institutional participants and individual participants, particularly those who serve as Chairs of CRC boards or board members.

The next two years will see the CRCs progressing further down the track from bright ideas to products and services which can generate new industries and reinvigorate old ones. As the third and fourth round centres come to full operation, and the program reaches maturity, we shall see more and more evidence of the economic benefits it will bring to Australia. The CRCs will help to build Australia's reputation as a nation with leading edge research capabilities that underpin a dynamic world class economy.

As Australia pursues full and successful membership of the global community we need improvement and maintenance of our innovative capacity. We need stronger alliances between business and the public sector, to exploit more effectively our investments in people, processes and production.

Knowledge, expertise, creativity and technology - these are our passports to a healthy and prosperous future. For the part which the scientific community in general, and the CRCs in particular, are playing in pursuing these goals, I should like to convey the thanks of the nation, and the firm commitment of the government.