



PRIME MINISTER

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

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CIVICS EXPERT GROUP

The Government has finalised today the membership of the Civics Expert Group.

I foreshadowed the creation of the Expert Group in my address to the New Educational Realities Conference on 15 June 1994. The Expert Group will provide the Government with a plan for a program of public education and information on Australian government, citizenship and the constitution. The Group's terms of reference are attached.

The Expert Group will be chaired by Professor Stuart Macintyre, the Ernest Scott Professor of History in the University of Melbourne and a Council Member of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation. Professor Macintyre has published numerous books on Australian history, most recently *A History for a Nation*.

The other members of the Group will be Dr Kenneth Boston, Director-General of the New South Wales Department of School Education; and Ms Susan Pascoe, Co-ordinating Chairperson (Policy) of the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne.

Under the terms of reference the Expert Group will provide the Government with a strategic plan for a non-partisan program of public education and information on the Australian system of government, the Australian Constitution, Australian citizenship and other civics issues. In addition, the Expert Group is to monitor the implementation of the education program and contribute to its evaluation.

The terms of reference will enable the Expert Group to consult widely, with education authorities, with political parties and with other expert and interested bodies of individuals in the field, such as the Constitutional Centenary Foundation.

I have asked the Group to report by 30 November 1994.

As a nation we do not seem to know enough about our system of government and our national achievements. As I said in my address on 15 June, the Government's education program will strengthen our democracy by enlivening our appreciation of it. It will inform all Australians of the privileges and responsibilities of Australian democracy and ensure that Australians have sufficient information about our system of Government to participate fully in decision-making processes.

CANBERRA
23 June 1994

CIVICS EXPERT GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The function of the Civics Expert Group is to provide the Government with a strategic plan for a non-partisan program of public education and information on the Australian system of government, the Australian Constitution, Australian citizenship and other civics issues. In addition, the Expert Group is to monitor the implementation of the program and contribute to its evaluation.

The Group will draw on an assessment of the current level of knowledge of governmental, constitutional, citizenship and civics matters in the community, based on research by an expert consultant working in consultation with the Group.

The goal of the Government's public education program is to ensure that Australians have sufficient information about our system of Government to participate fully in decision-making processes. The public education program would therefore be expected to cover a broad range of topics which may include: the Australian Constitution, its history and development; how the federal government is structured and operates, including the role and working of the Parliament, the Judicature and the Executive, together with the Governor-General and the Monarch; Australia as a federation and the roles of the three tiers of government; the role and responsibilities of the citizen in government (eg voting, jury duty); the principles of responsible parliamentary government; and the symbols and traditions of our government.

The education program should address the needs of school students and others in the community. The strategic plan should be available to the Prime Minister by 30 November 1994. The Government will arrange for its publication. The strategic plan should have regard to relevant initiatives undertaken by other organisations and should include recommendations concerning:

- (a) initiatives to address deficiencies in the level of public understanding of governmental, constitutional, citizenship and civics matters;
- (b) approaches to the development and testing of appropriate educational materials; and
- (c) the timing, implementation and evaluation of the education program.

In developing the strategic plan, the Expert Group should have regard to the following objectives for the education program:

- (a) to educate and inform the public about governmental, constitutional, citizenship and civics issues in Australia;
- (b) to help Australians understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to promote good citizenship; and
- (c) to enhance Australians' capacity to participate fully in decision-making processes affecting these issues.

In developing the strategic plan the Group should ensure that recommended initiatives:

- (a) have regard to rigorous quality standards and best practice in teaching and education;
- (b) are planned to ensure that materials are available on an equitable basis;
- (c) are non-partisan and likely to attract wide public acceptance;
- (d) take account of the need for rigorous standards of accountability;
- (e) use existing programs and delivery mechanisms where possible; and
- (f) are planned to provide for appropriate evaluation to assess efficiency and effectiveness.

The Expert Group should consult, to the extent practicable, with relevant organisations such as the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, with political parties and with Australia's government and non-government education sectors.