



**PRIME MINISTER**

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
OPENING OF THE HUNTER ADVANTAGE EXHIBITION  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA  
7 NOVEMBER 1994**

Well, let me say what a real pleasure it is to open the Hunter Advantage Exhibition.

And the timing couldn't be better.

Only this morning I was speaking to the National General Assembly of Local Governments about the enormous wealth of talent that exists in regional Australia.

And now we have it on full display here with the Hunter region - a region I might add that is one of great beauty and character.

The Hunter is a very old region, one of our oldest, but one which has certainly rejuvenated itself and now looks to the future with great confidence.

I think it's also worth making the point that in the great countries of the world, it's the regions that define them.

It's the regions, rather than the political boundaries of their states, which give countries their character.

It's certainly the case for France, Germany and Italy.

In Australia, this is also true, though it's not so well recognised.

But not only does the Hunter give this country character, it is also a region with a strong export profile, a region that knows what it means to Lead Local and Compete Global.

In fact, the picture of the Hunter today is very impressive indeed.

And it bears a little looking at.

Some of it, of course, is very familiar.

Most Australians will know about the Hunter's coal mines and coal export port - one the locals claim is the largest in the world but one that is certainly the largest in the southern hemisphere.

Most Australians will be familiar with the Hunter's enormous variety of agriculture.

Most, I imagine, will have quaffed the odd glass of world famous Hunter wine.

And not a few Australians will have caught waves on Newcastle's great surf beaches.

But I suspect far less Australians know about some of the other aspects of the Hunter, that it has in fact an increasingly diverse industrial profile with significant growth in it's high value added goods and services.

That's something borne out by this exhibition which includes some of Australia's best companies.

In fact, last Thursday I presented Hunter Valley Rewinds with one of only 12 Australian Quality Awards to be given this year.

The Hunter is also a region with a fine University which is playing its part in the export drive.

It has developed a water purification system, the TUNRA Jetflote, which is destined for export markets.

And its Centre for Industrial Control Science has developed a special computer controller for use in the mining, chemical, engineering and car industries.

This controller which has already generated considerable interest from many international firms will be chasing a share of what is potentially a multi-billion dollar export market.

But innovative products are by no means the preserve of the university sector and I couldn't but help noticing the Medicab, the automotive stretcher, that forms part of this exhibition.

I understand that the Joint House Department has already expressed interest in purchasing one for use here in the Parliament.

But if the developers want to double their sales here at Parliament House, they might do well to give the Leader of the Opposition a call.

Although the way things are going at the moment, I'm not sure whether he should station it near the House of Reps or the Senate.

I think it's also worth making the point that one of the reasons for the Hunter's success is that it has a very healthy industrial relations profile - that may have something to do with the fact that the Australian Centre for Best Practice has its head office in Newcastle.

But I suspect it's got more to do with the fact that the Hunter has developed a detailed enterprise agreement, one developed between the region's councils and unions, and one which McKinsey in their regional development study cited as an example of a sophisticated performance measurement driving changes in behaviour.

Over the years, the Government has sought to tap into the enormous assets of the Hunter and when necessary to give the region a hand up.

Through the Better Cities Program, we are providing \$70 million over a four year period to the Honeysuckle redevelopment, which has already begun to revitalise Newcastle, providing jobs and attracting private sector investment.

For my part, I should confess some involvement in the decision to set up a tax office in Newcastle, although I hear a few of the local business people will never forgive me for that.

But whatever assistance might have flowed to the Hunter from the Commonwealth and State Government over the years, this is little compared to that which has come from the leadership exercised by those people living and working within the Hunter itself.

This theme of leadership is one that I addressed in some detail this morning when I pointed out that, faced with the choice between \$2 million and 20 local leaders and \$50 million and no local leaders, regional leaders would opt for the former because local leadership is something that can't be bought.

In fact, the Hunter has a fine tradition of leadership and one which has been particularly strong in recent times.

It's leadership that came to the fore in the aftermath of the Newcastle earthquake.

It's leadership that continues today.

And it finds its expression in the many companies that are on display here.

Let me congratulate those who had the initiative to stage this exhibition, particularly Mrs Jill Wyborn from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Of course, this exhibition complements the other great work that is being done by many people and organisations right around the Hunter.

I'm thinking here of the contribution of the likes of Dr Margaret Bowman, the former Chairman of the Hunter Institute of Higher Education who participated in the Regional Development Taskforce chaired by Bill Kelty.

I'm also thinking of the work done by Rotary as part of the Employ Australia initiative which has seen more than 2500 vacancies notified to the CES over the past 3 weeks.

With leadership like this, it's difficult not to feel optimistic about the Hunter's future.

And it's something that will be given a huge boost when a Regional Development Organisation is shortly established in the Hunter.

This Regional Development Organisation will have a major role in harnessing the enormous leadership reserves in the Hunter and putting into place a strategy for the region.

It is, as you know, one of the major *Working Nation* initiatives designed to ensure that regional Australia also participates in the strong economic growth now underway.

I suspect this commercial may have run a little longer than it should have but then there are so many good things to say about the Hunter.

Perhaps I might leave any further comments to others here.

So let me finish up with my own vote of confidence in the Hunter and my congratulations to all those associated with the putting together of this fine exhibition.

Thank you.