



## PRIME MINISTER

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

### MEETING OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING COUNCIL

At today's meeting of my Science and Engineering Council, Professor Fiona Stanley, a member of Council and head of the Institute of Child Health Research in Perth, presented a report entitled *Research for a Healthy Society*. The report was prepared by an independent working party of which Professor Stanley was convenor.

The key message of this report is that health and medical research have a great impact on the health and quality of life of all Australians. It focuses on the way health and medical research feeds into clinical practice and the delivery of health services, reducing the rates of preventable illness and premature death, and improving the cost-effectiveness and equity of supply of services.

The report presents a number of case studies to illustrate its arguments. For example, it points to the success of Australian scientists in identifying the link between peptic ulcers and the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*. It now appears likely that 80-90% of peptic ulcers can be cured with two weeks of antibiotic treatment.

A particular emphasis is the need for more private sector funding for health and medical research. The report notes that backing by philanthropic and industry sources on the major scale common in other countries is still rare in Australia.

The working party has identified a number of important issues. I have asked my colleague the Minister for Human Services and Health, Dr Lawrence, to respond to its recommendations.

A second item concerned high performance computing and communications (HPCC).

HPCC is an exciting technology, and a powerful tool for tackling a variety of industry and other problems, such as designing complex engineering components, or modelling the greenhouse effect. It comprises the 'top end' of computing power and performance, ranging from high performance workstations to the latest and most powerful supercomputers.

An independent working party chaired by Dr John O'Callaghan, Chief of the Division of Information Technology in CSIRO, drew the Council's attention to the need for an Action Plan to develop HPCC in Australia. Their report identified a need to develop internationally competitive HPCC capability in Australia. It also noted that industry has been very slow in taking up the technology and realising the considerable benefits it offers.

The Government wants to encourage industry to make the most of the increased competitiveness and cost savings that can be gained from the application of HPCC. It already has in place a number of strategies for supporting HPCC technologies. These include funding through the Australian Research Council, through Cooperative Research Centres, and through the National Research Facilities Program announced in *Working Nation*.

I have asked the Minister for Industry, Science and Technology, Senator Cook, and the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Crean, to advise me on the future development of HPCC capability in Australia.

The Council meeting also included an Innovation Forum, chaired by the Minister for Industry Science and Technology and Minister Assisting for Science, Senator Peter Cook.

This forum involved a number of short presentations from industry and other leaders, on their experiences of the innovation process. Topics addressed included the innovation in the mining industry, in universities, in technology based companies, and the global environment for innovation.

The session was part of the Government's consultation process in the lead up to the 1995 Statement on Innovation.

The Council is a forum which allows me and other Ministers with responsibility for science and technology to meet leaders of industry and members of the scientific community. It meets twice a year.

Today's discussions at the Council emphasised its important role in the science and technology consultation process, and in bringing in science, engineering and technology matters to the attention of Government.

**CANBERRA**  
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