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PRIME MINISTER

***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY ***

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
LAUNCH OF THE SOUTH METROPOLITAN (WA) ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT REGION, WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SPECIALITY ALLOYS
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It was with real excitement that I accepted the invitation to come here today and 'launch the region', the first in the West.

This is a first step, taken by some very industrious people, to contribute to their community by applying certain of the ideas articulated by this Government in the White Paper, Working Nation.

One of the landmark initiatives in the White Paper was the Regional Economic Development Program.

Many of this nation's economic problems, and the solutions to those problems, are to be found at the regional level.

The idea behind the Regional Economic Development Program is simple, but ambitious. The idea is to take a region and empower it.

To isolate its talents, to harness its energy, to coordinate its resources, to bring together its people.

The Program is not about plying regions with extra funds, but allowing regions to articulate their own visions and helping them to achieve those visions, through business collaboration and development of regional strategies, priorities and projects.

This agenda can only be achieved if the local stakeholders have a high degree of participation in the regional institutions, and ownership of the regional processes.

That is what differentiates this Program from the failed 1970s concept of regional development based on urban growth centres. In those days, economic strategies were dreamed up elsewhere, and imposed on regional communities. The decision makers misread local conditions, and lacked local support.

By contrast, the Regional Economic Development Program has been developed on a platform of broadly-based community participation. The strategy is anchored in the regions themselves, and draws heavily on their resources. Ideas and initiatives derive from the regional communities.

And as we see today, they are springing forth.

That's not to say the Commonwealth Government is a mere passenger.

In the initial stages, the Commonwealth is a catalyst - a spark plug. It draws all the parties together, and focusses community dialogue.

Where a core group of regional leaders emerge and form a Steering Committee, the Commonwealth will establish a Regional Economic Development Organisation (a REDO) to help with directions.

Where required, and at the request of Steering Committee, the Commonwealth will fund regional conferences to identify the strengths and resources of the region, the capacities of its institutions, and possible bridges to other regions. We will help to enhance those capacities, and build more of those bridges.

The development and implementation of strategies to increase employment and investment requires both vision and the commitment of resources. The Commonwealth will commit up to \$240,000 over three years to fund the operation of a REDO, to support that vision.

Where infrastructure bottlenecks are impeding regional economic development, the Commonwealth will help overcome them.

We will do it either by direct funding or by Infrastructure Bonds which encourage private sector investment through Commonwealth tax concessions.

To accomplish all this, the Commonwealth will spend \$150 million over four years under the Program.

And this does not represent the totality of Commonwealth assistance to regional economic development.

The Regional Economic Development Program will be a vehicle for the delivery of other Commonwealth assistance and services to the regions. These services will be channelled in focussed and imaginative ways, and their impact will be profound.

I said on Australia Day that the development of regional Australia along these lines has a potential comparable to our immigration programs.

It can make Australia more dynamic, adventurous and outward-looking; more diverse - and much stronger.

If we can get regional economies going with a place in the mainstream of the national economy - and indeed the global economy - we will get stronger communities in every other sense, including the social sense.

Above all, of course, we are going to get jobs - and jobs with a future.

The Commonwealth Government's regional development strategy boasts an ambitious agenda.

Such an agenda is only achievable if we work in concert with local and state governments, as well as with business, unions and education research bodies.

The Commonwealth does not seek to duplicate or usurp the economic development programs undertaken by other governments. Rather, we seek to build on and add value to these already-existing programs.

Deputy Premier Cowan and his department have cooperated in the initial steps.

I am also pleased to hear that these initiatives in the metropolitan area have been supported by the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Western Australian Municipal Association and the Trades and Labour Council of Western Australia.

So this region, embracing the municipalities of Melville, East Fremantle, Fremantle, Cockburn, Kwinana, Rockingham, Gosnells, Armadale, Serpentine-Jarrahdale and the proposed municipality of Shepperton, now has an opportunity to work more effectively towards employment and investment.

To Kyle Abbott, thank you for making this venue available today. A most appropriate venue for a program promoting Australian exports.

To the business and industry leaders of the region, thank you for accepting the responsibility of leadership.

Your investment of knowledge and skills in the community is an investment in the future. It is like applying the old agricultural axiom - return to the soil what has been taken from it.

The most extraordinary resource of this region is clearly its people. The South Metropolitan Region is fortunate in having a very dedicated group of community leaders who form the Steering Committee:

- Mrs Charlotte Stockwell of the South West Corridor Development and Employment Foundation;
- Mr Jay Hardison of the Heritage Country Development Agency;
- Mr Lyn Metcalf of the City of South Perth;
- Mr John Hardwick, also of the City of South Perth;
- Ms Lorraine McKeig of the Kwinana office of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- Professor John Wood of Notre Dame University; and
- Professor Peter Newman of Murdoch University.

To this pioneering Steering Committee, I offer you my congratulations and my Government's support.

As tangible proof of this support, I am pleased to announce a major Commonwealth Program Delivery Initiative in this region - a result of recommendations made in the Kelty report, subsequent studies by government officials, consultations with regional communities and a study by Price Waterhouse.

A group of Commonwealth officials will be formed here to assist with your regional strategies, to search for partnership opportunities and help address problems impeding the region's growth strategy.

This group will consist of the senior officials from key Commonwealth agencies involved in the region such as the Departments of Employment, Education and Training, Housing and Regional Development, Social Security, Defence, Industry Science and Technology, the Australian Technology, Science and Industry Council, and Austrade.

As this Initiative is progressively established it will provide ballast for your regional strategy, broadening and deepening the region's capacities.

I am pleased to hand over a cheque for \$23,800 to fund the regional audit and search conference process to help the Steering Committee to identify the region's strengths, possible social and economic linkages between the various municipalities and to develop a proposed structure for a REDO for your region.

I wish you well in your endeavours.