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**EMBARGOED UNTIL 6.30pm
8.3.95*****

PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP OPENING OF AUSTRALIAN STAND AT CeBIT'95 HANOVER - 8 MARCH 1995

It is a pleasure to be in Hanover opening this Australian stand at CeBIT'95. It is also a source of pride which I trust is shared by all the Australian companies represented here.

We are sharing the exhibition with some of the world's best companies, in some of the world's most competitive industries.

It is a signal honour that Australia has been chosen as this year's Partner Country for CeBIT, and Australia's information technology and telecommunications companies have responded with unprecedented enthusiasm to the opportunity this fair presents to show Germany, Europe and the world what the Australian industry has achieved.

One of the problems faced by Australian manufacturers and service industries in marketing themselves abroad is the absence of internationally recognised Australian brand names.

Our companies are doing remarkable things in information technology and communications, but their achievements often go unremarked and anonymous. Often they are masked by the names of the overseas companies with which they are connected.

The fact is Australia does not live in the international mind as a famously technological society. We do not have companies which fly the flag in the way that a Siemens flies it for Germany, or Phillips for The Netherlands or Microsoft for the United States.

I have no doubt that Australian companies of this kind will soon emerge. Telstra, to offer one example, is becoming a well known Australian brand in Asia. Intellect, a CeBIT veteran which sells advanced point of sale and smart card technology, is now a multinational firm operating in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe.

It will take time, but the important thing is to recognise that the process has begun, and that the emergence of such companies will signify not only their individual success but another step in the transformation of Australia.

The presence of 170 Australian companies at CeBIT was unimaginable just a few years ago. It demonstrates how much the environment has changed in Australia, how much it has adapted to the changed international environment.

CeBIT'96 will change it that much more. For your companies and for Australia it has, I believe, an historic dimension.

It is not too much to say that you carry the future in your hands. Not alone, of course: those traditional sectors of the Australian economy which have served us so well down the years will continue to underpin our economic success, at least so long as they continue to modernise and adapt to technological and global change. So too will other new and sophisticated elements of our manufacturing industry.

But no other industry carries such real and symbolic importance as the one in which your companies are working. And no industry serves all other industries, or is so fundamental to their future success, as your industry is.

It is also true to say that more than any other sector of the economy, information technology and communications will define the sort of society we become in the 21st century.

On your success, and on how we Australian governments apply the new technology, substantially depends the achievement of our national ambitions.

Your work fits our strategy.

We need an innovative, competitive modern manufacturing industry. You are providing us with one.

We need an export-oriented economy integrated with our region and the world. You are helping us to build it.

We need to re-vitalise our regions. Your industry can help us do it.

We need to overcome the distances which separate people and communities from each other and Australia from the world. That is what you are about.

To make Australia competitive and to expand the realm of opportunity for Australians now and in the future, we need comprehensive and effective vocational education and training. Your industry will play a crucial role.

Information technology and communications is a basic and defining element in our economic and social ambitions - a world competitive economy underpinning an egalitarian, inclusive society.

It is an industry with vast potential for good. It can make us a more productive nation, make all sectors of our economy more efficient, increase our exports. It can deliver better health and other social services.

To quote just three examples of this potential: among the companies represented here are some like Mincom, which has developed sophisticated systems for managing capital intensive industries including mining, manufacturing and defence; and Rosetta Laboratories who have developed Braille computers, optical character reading machines that read to the blind; and Earth Resources Mapping, whose spectacular graphics packages for visualising and analysing satellite pictures of the earth for applications like mineral exploration, mapping and city planning, have set a world standard.

Yet we shouldn't forget the most fundamental fact about these new technologies - I mean the fact that properly applied, they can make all our lives easier.

They go directly to the most commonplace and essential of our activities. This is emphatically not "boys with toys" technology. It is technology to make shopping easier, banking simpler, teaching more effective, transport safer, our public service more efficient. It can give us better hospitals and health services. It can enlarge our experience of the arts, open new channels of creativity, deliver new and better realms of entertainment.

It has profoundly democratic possibilities.

Yet none of these benefits are inevitable. They will not happen by themselves. They won't happen in Australia and they won't happen in the world unless we decide that they should happen and resolve to find the best ways to make them happen.

Recently I heard about a startling fact which I think we could usefully bear in mind when we talk about communications and information technology: it is that half the world's population has never made a telephone call.

We will fail ourselves and future generations if we allow the new technology to compound the difference which now exists between developed and developing countries - if we allow information technology and communications to be as unfairly distributed as the world's other resources.

And what is true of the global application of the new technologies is true in different degrees for Australia. We need a strategy which will ensure that the great potential of IT and T is realised in the interests of our democratic and social goals.

I think I can say with some certainty that Australia has considered more fully than most countries all the implications - regulatory, technical and social - of the information society.

Last week I launched a major report commissioned by the Government into the provision of broadband services. The report lays the groundwork for the Government to be a leading-edge user of the new technology. Our objective is not just to improve the way we perform the existing functions of Government but, much more broadly, to re-engineer its work - to deliver in completely new and more effective ways services ranging from health in remote areas to the kinds of entertainment we see every night in our suburban homes.

Many of you will also be aware that last year we delivered two major statements: the first on employment, the second on Australian cultural development. Both expressly took account of the new technologies. Both were designed to stimulate and give democratic and social direction to the IT industry.

Australia may not yet be well known for its technological innovation and excellence, we may not yet have that Siemens, or Sony or Microsoft, but the companies represented here at CeBIT may reasonably think of themselves as being leaders among those who are establishing such a reputation for us.

These 170 companies collectively carry one message to the 700,000 people who are expected to visit this exhibition: it is that Australia knows the way the world is going and will not be left behind.

Let me then congratulate them for their enterprise and wish them good luck in their ventures.

Let me also congratulate all those who worked so hard to put this together, ~~the people of~~ AUSTRALIA and Dieter Le Comte and his team.

As I have said so many times in the past, Australia's future is very much tied to our close engagement with the economies of the Asia-Pacific, not least with our export to them of information technology and telecommunications. For that reason I want to welcome in particular the members of business delegations who have come here from Guangzhou and Japan especially to meet with Australian exhibitors.

I also want to say how pleased I am that Australian State Governments are giving this exhibition their full support; and that the Premier of Queensland, Wayne Goss, Deputy Premier Cowan from Western Australia and Minister Gude from Victoria have all made the effort to be here today.

And finally let me thank our German hosts, whose generosity and hospitality have made this visit so rewarding and enjoyable - particularly the people of Hanover.

Since European settlement in 1788 Australians have always known Hanover as the place from which the British - and, therefore, the Australian - monarchy came. When that connection passes, as I am sure it soon must, this new link may well remain - the link formed between Australia and Hanover by this most 21st century event, CeBIT'95.

It is now my pleasure to officially open this Australian exhibit at CeBIT'95.
