



PRIME MINISTER

28/95

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

A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGIES

The Government has agreed to implement a national strategy aimed for the adoption of new information and communications services and technologies - the so-called 'information superhighway'.

These new services and technologies will change the way we live, work and play. Their effect on our businesses, our schools and universities, our hospitals, our governments, and many other aspects of our daily lives, will be profound.

We have the opportunity to plan for a fairer, healthier, better educated and more productive 'information society', through a managed and consultative approach to the use of information and communications services and technologies.

In building a national strategy, we will draw on a number of recent expert investigations into information and communications services and technologies - such as the Broadband Services Expert Group, the Australian Science and Technology Council review of the provision of Internet services in Australia, and an independent review of the Commonwealth's acquisition and use of information technology.

The best way to address the issues raised by these reports is through a coordinated and whole-of-government approach, particularly in the areas of formation of national policy, the Government's own use of technologies, and industry development.

To achieve this, we will establish an Ad Hoc Committee of Cabinet, which I will chair, which will consider the development of a national strategy on information and communications networks and services.

We will also establish a high level policy body within government, reporting to the Ad Hoc Committee of Cabinet through the Minister for Communications and the Arts. This body will provide advice on broad national policy issues, and also identify matters for discussion by government, industry and the community.

At the June 1994 meeting of the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council, many of these reports were discussed, and significant national issues raised. Building on these discussions, I have established the National Information Services Council under the auspices of this peak body.

The National Information Services Council will be a high level discussion forum for broad policy issues, providing industry and community input into the Government's consideration of the issues.

An important part of any national strategy will be addressing the Government's own use of communications services and technologies. We have decided to establish a Government Information Services Policy Board to coordinate a user-driven whole-of-government approach to the Government's use of these important services and networks. This Board will be chaired by a new position of Chief Government Information Officer in the Finance portfolio, and supported by an Office of Government Information Technology.

We are also considering ways in which we can stimulate the use of information and communications services and technologies in various sectors of the economy including industry, education, employment, social services and other areas. We have agreed that:

We will pursue the use of information and communications technologies to deliver government services to business, foster the development of information technology and telecommunications industries in Australia, and explore ways of ensuring we have an effective science base.

We will explore ways of networking schools and TAFEs, and of making available educational services and content on public access networks.

We will develop the use of networks to improve the delivery of social and employment services to Australians, and as communication tools for communities.

We will encourage best practice in the use of information and communications services and technologies in government, and as part of this press forward with the staged implementation of electronic commerce by Commonwealth agencies.

These activities are a beginning. Clearly, much more will need to be done.

We have agreed that, over the next year, we will consider further the various issues relating to industry, social services, education, research, regulations, access, privacy, security and a wide range of other factors affecting the uptake of the new information and communications services and technologies.

We aim to address these issues in a systematic way, and put in place, by the end of this year, processes and policies which will provide the leadership and framework for moving into the next century.

CANBERRA
6 April 1995