



PRIME MINISTER

64/95

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON PJ KEATING MP, AND THE TREASURER, THE HON RALPH WILLIS MP

COMMITTEE ON DARWIN REPORT

The Committee on Darwin, chaired by the Hon. Neville Wran AC QC, today delivered its report to the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments. The Committee reported on the feasibility and potential of developing Darwin as Australia's northern link to East Asia.

The approach adopted by the Committee is realistic and practical, and will make a valuable contribution to Darwin's future development.

An important conclusion of the report was that while proximity to East Asia was an advantage for Darwin, it was not in itself enough to guarantee success. Nevertheless, the Committee considered that—as Australia's only capital city in the tropics and with its already extensive commercial and official links with countries to its near north—Darwin has considerable potential to further develop as an important centre and that it can continue to make an important contribution to Australia's overall relationship with the region.

To do this the report says that Darwin must expand its economic base, but that this will depend primarily on private sector investment. An objective of policy, therefore, must be for Darwin to convince investors that the city is a competitive business location. The Committee has made a number of constructive suggestions to achieve this.

The Committee's 77 recommendations range across a number of portfolio interests. Obviously these shall need to be considered by relevant Ministers both in Canberra and Darwin.

Released with the report are the findings of the 18 separate studies commissioned by the Committee. These studies—covering Darwin's transport infrastructure, health and education services, business services, tourism, defence, cost of living, business perceptions and development

prospects in East Asia—will provide valuable information for private investors and government.

Of major interest is the Committee's conclusion that the Alice Springs – Darwin railway may become economically viable early next century. Importantly, however, the Committee has also recognised that even then considerable public investment would be required and that funding of this project would need to be compared with other possible public sector infrastructure projects.

The Government thanks Mr Wran and his Committee for its hard work in the preparation of its report.

CANBERRA
29 June 1995