

12



PRIME MINISTER

SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM

I am pleased to be attending the 27th South Pacific Forum from 3 to 5 September in Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands.

This will be my first meeting with many of the island leaders, including President Kabua who will be chairing the meeting. I am looking forward to hearing their views on the challenges facing the region and their experiences in addressing them.

The South Pacific is an important region for Australia. My Government is conscious that the region looks to Australia for leadership and support as the island countries take steps to secure their futures. Australia will provide both.

Heads of government will be able to discuss the progress being made on economic reform and sustainable development of the region's natural resources. The previous Forum chaired by Sir Julius Chan in Madang enunciated some important economic reform objectives. I hope that we can find practical ways of building on those. My Government will firmly back the economic reform efforts of the island countries.

If we are going to ensure the region's economic well being for the longer term, our natural resources - especially our fisheries and forests - need to be harvested in a way which safeguards the interests of future generations. I expect leaders will want to reaffirm the political commitments on resource management made at Forums in Brisbane and Madang and explore ways in which these can be reinforced.

Finally, I will take the opportunity to brief leaders on Australia's aid to the South Pacific. In a budget which has required many tough decisions, the Government has managed to maintain Australia's assistance to the region at close to 1995-96 nominal levels, reflecting the priority we attach to the South Pacific.

30 August 1996