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PRIME MINISTER

13 September 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
OPENING SPEECH TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S
SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING COUNCIL**

E & OE.....

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. This is an inaugural exercise for me. It's the fourteenth meeting of the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council but it is of course the first such meeting to occur since the change of government in March and therefore it's the first meeting that I and my Ministerial colleagues, in particularly the Minister for Science and Technology Peter McGauran but also attended by a number of other ministers, including the Minister for Primary Industry and later on this afternoon, the Minister for Schools and Education. And it's also attended by a very large number, I think some 14 in number of Coalition Members and Senators.

I would also like to extend a special welcome to a number of people who are attending their first meeting today - Professor John De Laeter of the Curtin University of Technology, Professor Fay Gale, President of the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee and Dr Joe Baker, President of the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies. I do have an apology from John Moore, the Minister for Industry, Science and Tourism and one of the Council Members, Dr Ed Tweddell.

I would like to in front of an invited audience make the point that this is the first time that the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council has invited Members of Parliament, the media and interested scientists and others to observe part of the council meeting. We want to broaden community understanding of the work of the council, and through that emphasise the importance that the members of the council and also of course the Government, and the Prime Minister in particular, and the Ministers also in particular, place on the work of the Council and quite a deal of the areas of discussion that will be in the opening session to which members of the public and the media have been invited touch upon subjects that are important to contemporary scientific and

political debate and through that I hope we can broaden in a small way community understanding of the work of the council and the role that science and technology does play in everyday life and how important it is to the solution of ongoing national problems. I do hope that the guests who are here today as part of that new approach find something of value and something of enjoyment from the proceedings.

I believe that the new Government, through both its policy statement on science and technology and engineering and its actions in the recent budget has shown a strong commitment to supporting science and technology. It has provided generously in the budget for assistance to our best researches through increased funding for the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council. Additional funds have been provided to research infrastructure. That's \$90 million over three years and research training, \$9.3 million over three years for 100 additional post graduate research scholarships.

Research industry interaction was subsequently boosted through extra resources for the Co-operative Research Centre's program. While the extent of application and the level of the industrial research and the development tax concessions have been reduced, we believe that the concession still remains generous in comparison with those of other OECD nations and the new R & D start program introduced in the budget will provide attractive project based packages of very considerable help to Australian industry.

This morning's agenda items will deal with, firstly ways for science and technology in managing Australia's inland waters and presentations by two active scientists on their areas of research. The afternoon session will involve a presentation on a current study by the Australian Science, Technology and Engineering Council on primary school science and technology, and presentations from the major science and technology representative bodies on key issues confronting Australian science and technology. The agenda papers for today's meeting will be published including on the Internet. I will draw members' attention to the minutes of the last meeting held on the 8th of December last year which are the members' agenda papers.

We now move, ladies and gentlemen, to our first presentation for the morning which is called *Managing Australia's Inland Waters - Roles For Science and Technology*. This is an important topic as the sustainable use of our natural resources is vital to our future. In Australia, in particular, proper management of our water resources is critical to sustaining agriculture, the environment and even human health. The Coalition's proposal about which much has been written and said to establish the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia into which will be paid, continuant on the sale of one third of Telstra, \$1 billion to establish a fund in perpetuity for major environmental works is, in part, a recognition of the thrust of various Science Council work on sustaining the agricultural resource base.

Today's session on waterwork resources will add to our understanding of the natural resource which is important to us all. The presentations will focus on the Murray Darling Basin and the Great Artesian Basin. There will be three speakers to begin with and they will be followed by discussion. I would now, ladies and gentlemen, like to ask Professor John Murray, the President of the Murray Darling Basin Commission, to

lead off the presentations and introduce the other speakers. But before asking him to the microphone, may I say to all of you, for me, this is a new experience. It is a privilege as Prime Minister to chair a body that is so directly concerned about planning for the long term future of the country a body which is so directly responsible for giving high quality advice to the Government and to the community generally about matters that will affect the way in which we live in this country, the extent to which we are mature and responsible enough to husband the resources given to us by nature and whether we are to strike that often elusive balance between protecting and nurturing our natural environment, but at the same time allowing for proper and progressive economic development which is also important to the future quality of the lives that we live.

But ladies and gentlemen, I invite Professor Laver to open discussion on the first of the agenda items. Thank you very much.

PMSEC MEETING — ATTENDANCE FOR MORNING SESSION

COUNCIL MEMBERS (At the table):

Ministers:

The Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP (Chair)
The Minister for Science and Technology, the Hon Peter McGauran MP (Deputy Chair)
The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, the Hon John Anderson MP
The Minister for the Environment, Senator the Hon Robert Hill
The Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator the Hon Richard Alston
The Minister for Health and Family Services, the Hon Dr Michael Wooldridge MP
The Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Senator the Hon
Amanda Vanstone

Ex Officio Members:

Dr Joe Baker, President, Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies
Professor Fay Gale, President, Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
Dr Keith Boardman, for Sir Gustav Nossal, President, Australian Academy of Science
Mr Peter Laver, for Sir Arvi Parbo, President, Australian Academy of Technological
Sciences and Engineering
Dr Don Williams, Chairman, Australian Science, Technology and Engineering Council

Personal members:

Dr Claire Baxter, Director, Business Liaison Office, University of Sydney
Mr Ian Berckelman, Chief Executive, Vocational and Technical Training Corporation
Australia Pty Ltd
Dr Greg Clark, President, Technology Group, News Corporation
Dr Malcolm McIntosh, Chief Executive, CSIRO, for Professor Adrienne Clarke, Chair,
CSIRO Board
Dr Edwina Cornish, Managing Director, Florigene Pty Ltd
Mr Norman Fussell, Chairman, Queensland Industry Development Corporation
Professor John de Laeter, Curtin University of Technology
Dr Ian Mair, Immediate Past President, The Institution of Engineers, Australia
Professor Fiona Stanley, Director, TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
Dr Edward Tweddell, Group Managing Director and CEO, F H Faulding and Co Limited
Mr John Vines, Executive Director, The Association of Professional Engineers,
Scientists and Managers, Australia
Professor Michael Pitman, Chief Scientist

Dr John Bell, Acting Secretary and Chief Science Adviser, Department of Industry,
Science and Tourism (Acting Executive Officer)