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PRIME MINISTER

September 13, 1996

WATER MANAGEMENT CRUCIAL FOR AUSTRALIA

The crucial need for improved research and management of Australia's most valuable inland water resources, the Murray-Darling and Great Artesian Basins, has been underscored by today's meeting of the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council (PMSEC).

I was pleased to receive a direct briefing from leaders of the science community and representatives of the major science users on this and other important issues and priorities.

The briefing stressed the importance to Australian agriculture and to the conservation of our fragile environment of informed management of these Basins, using the best available scientific knowledge.

The issue of managing our inland waters is vital for the future of agriculture, the environment and human health. The Government's National Heritage Trust will play a central role in providing that proper management, and the \$1 billion to be provided to that Trust from the partial sale of Telstra demonstrates the commitment of the Government to well-informed management and sustainability.

Some concerns raised today included the need to conserve water in the Great Artesian Basin, water quality, including problems caused by salinity and agricultural chemicals, and the crucial role of allocating water in the Basins to ensure economically and environmentally sustainable use.

Improving our environment has always been a key issue in the bush and today's discussion and future work demonstrate the Coalition Government's strong commitment to regional Australia.

The forum further demonstrates the Government's practical green agenda.

I have asked the Ministers for the Environment and Primary Industries and Energy to report on how Australia can best apply the information that was presented at the meeting to practical outcomes.

I have also asked the Ministers for Industry, Science and Tourism and Science and Technology to examine other issues raised. These include the commercial opportunities offered by genetic modification of cut flowers; control of rabbits through mortality and fertility control; and the awareness and understanding of science at primary school level.

Other issues examined include the role of science in contributing to national welfare, maintenance of traditional industries, concern for the environment, commercialisation of research, science education and national scientific facilities.

For the first time, the morning session of PMSEC was open to the public. In this way, the Government has ensured that its consideration of important science and technology issues is more effectively communicated, not only to our scientific community, but to all Australians.