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PRIME MINISTER

THE OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY AND THE PACIFIC

I am delighted to announce today Australia's willingness to underwrite the cost of taking the torch relay of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games to Pacific island countries.

Some private sponsors might well wish to participate by making a contribution to the torch relay. We would welcome that involvement.

One of the key events in the lead up to any Olympic Games is the lighting of the Olympic torch at Mount Olympus in Greece, its passage to the host country and the torch relay around the host country before the arrival of the torch at the Olympic stadium.

One of the themes of Sydney's bid for the 2000 Games was that this would be the Pacific games, projecting a positive image of the Pacific to the world. Tourism is very important to the region and the torch relay will give island countries a strong boost.

The proposal is that the torch go to all Olympic member countries around the Pacific before it comes to Australia for the Games. This will include American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Guam, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Samoa.

This will enable Pacific island countries to share even more closely in the spirit of the 2000 Olympic Games and place island countries in the world spotlight in May-June 2000 as the torch is taken through the region.

17 September 1997