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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Substantive session of 1998

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Third periodic reports submitted by States parties
under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant

Addendum
AUSTRALIA* **

[15 June 1998]

* The second periodic reports concerning rights covered by articles 6 to 9 (E/1984/7/Add.22) and by articles 10 to 12 submitted by the Government of Australia were considered by the Sessional Working Group of Governmental Experts on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its 1985 (see E/1985/WG.1/SR.1718 and 21) and 1986 (see E/1986/WG.1/SR.1011 and 1314) sessions, respectively. The second periodic report concerning rights covered by articles 13 to 15 (E/1990/7/Add.13) was considered by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its eighth session (see E/C.12/1993/SR.13, 15 and 20) in 1993.

The annexes and appendices referred to in the present report are available for consultation in the Committee's secretariat.

** The information submitted by Australia in accordance with the guidelines concerning the initial part of reports of States parties is contained in the core document HRI/CORE/1/Add.44.

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Science and technology

351. The Department of Industry, Science and Tourism funds a number of public research facilities the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), and the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS). Analysis indicates that there is low investment in research and development by Australian business and industry, and a slow uptake of scientific knowledge generated by public institutions. Barriers to commercialization of public sector research include lack of awareness of its importance, a "culture gap" between researchers and the business community, and the small size of Australian companies.

352. Questacon, The National Science and Technology Centre also plays a key role in increasing public awareness of science and technology. Questacon develops and operates a wide range of interactive exhibitions and public programmes, with a particular focus on reaching regional and remote communities around Australia.

353. Several programmes have been initiated to try to strengthen the links between research and its commercialization and other applications. Since 1988 government research agencies have had to seek part of their funding from external sources. This has increased the level of contact and effective communication between industry and researchers, and directed agency activities to areas where there is evidence of market or community support. The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) programme involves the collaboration of industry, universities, and government agencies in long-term research projects. Emphasis is placed on the involvement of research users in the work of the centres.

354. Centres may receive government funding for up to 50 per cent of their total operating costs. The remaining costs are to be met by the participating organizations. Funding is granted on a competitive basis, according to established selection criteria. At the end of 1995/1996, there were 62 CRCs in operation. In addition to those with commercial objectives, a number of CRCs focus on outcomes for health and the environment.

355. AusIndustry is a Federal, State and Territory Governments' initiative which aims to help businesses become more internationally competitive. AusIndustry delivers programmes to support business research and development (R & D), including competitive R & D grants and an R & D tax concession scheme. The Industry, Research and Development Board (IR & D) oversees the IR & D grants and loans programmes, and the IR & D tax concession scheme. The IR & D Act 1986, provides the legislative basis for the operation of the Board. IR & D Act, Section 39F, allows any body of persons to apply for registration as an Australian Research Agency, for the purpose of performing R & D activities on behalf of registered, eligible companies. Registration allows eligible companies to claim a tax concession for R & D activities. Section 39H of the Act states that the register of research agencies is to be made available for inspection and that a list of registered research agencies and the classes of activities in relation to their registration is to be listed in the annual Board report.

356. The Science and Technology Awareness Program was established in 1989, with the aim of increasing awareness and understanding of the central role which science and technology play in Australia's economic and social wellbeing. The ultimate vision for the Program is a nation whose citizens are well-informed about science and technology issues, and whose young people are giving due consideration to extending their formal education in science, engineering and technology beyond the compulsory years of schooling. Target groups for the Program are young people, women, media, industry leaders and scientists. The Program has been devised as an interrelated suite of activities, each with particular target groups, deriving from an overall strategy which has short, medium and long-term objectives. Activities supported include student participation in international science and mathematics Olympiads, and support for Australian-developed science textbooks and curriculum materials for primary and secondary students.

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International contacts and cooperation

359. Australia promotes cooperation with scientists and academics around the world. The Australian Government administers bilateral agreements and other arrangements on scientific and technological cooperation with around 25 countries. The Government provides funding assistance to Australian scientists and academics cooperating internationally, through a wide range of programmes administered by various Departments.

360. The Department of Industry, Science and Tourism's International Science and Technology Program (ISTP) provides approximately \$5.6 million per year to assist Australian researchers with the costs of overseas travel and living expenses. In some cases, ISTP also assists researchers from developing countries to undertake cooperative activities in Australia. The Department's overseas network of Industry, Science and Technology Counsellors helps scientists and academics abroad to obtain information about the Australian science and technology system, and to establish links with Australian counterparts.

361. Please also refer to articles 30 and 31 of Australia's 1996 report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to article 27 of Australia's report under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. (Refer to appendices 86-100 for supplementary information on the protection of this right.)