

# Australia's Rich Resource

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**by the Hon John Fahey, MP**

Minister for Finance

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I am delighted to have this opportunity to join with you and to represent the Prime Minister. The theme of this Symposium is an important one and its timing in the life of the new Government is useful. It effectively makes a statement - and it asks a question. *The Way Forward - Unlocking Australia's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, recognises that the linguistic and cultural smorgasbord in Australia offers a unique opportunity to enhance our productive diversity. But the all important question is *How to make it happen? How to benefit - collectively - from the evolution of Australia into a country with such a rich cultural and linguistic diversity?*

This Symposium will play an important part in drawing attention to successful examples of businesses already harnessing - and profiting from - that diversity. The challenges for the delegates here is to showcase those success stories, and to set up an agenda of issues that can be pursued by all stakeholders, including Government.

The Government is committed to linguistic and cultural diversity within an overarching framework of national unity. The cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia is a fact. Our island nation has welcomed to its shores the people of the world, inviting them to "call Australia home" - to work, to play - and to raise

families - as Australians and for Australia.

If there has ever really been such a thing as a "typical Aussie", he or she will, in the 1990's have a very different background to what might have been regarded as "typical" in the 1950s. Over one fifth of Australian residents were born overseas; Australian residents born in non-English speaking countries - at the time of the last census made up over 13% of the population; migrants from more than 160 nations have settled in Australia, emigrating knowing English is the national language of Australia and prepared to embrace the resident culture.

It is undeniably to the advantage of those who come here to call Australia home, that they learn, and become fluent in, the national language. It not only facilitates their productive capacity, it is also invaluable for Australia in the community of nations to be able to capitalise fully on a bi or multilingual work force. It is a productive asset.

The Government has pledged additional resources over the next four years to English language training and education. And it is committed to the further development of Australia's rich resource of bi and multilingualism to the further development of the productive capacity which results from that diversity.

The education sector has the capacity to play a central role in drawing to the attention of the community, the value of this rich resource - not only in tertiary level business courses, but also at the school level.

Australian businesses have long been accustomed to overcoming the tyranny of distance, always quick to adopt and adapt any new technology which reduces the time to

conduct transactions. Every new advance in information technology has always found an enthusiastic market in Australia. The latest is the conduct of business through on-line facilities. The on-line world is little heed to political boundaries, and its rapid expansion is understandably attractive to business.

Perhaps the answer lies in marrying our linguistic and cultural assets and the evolution in communications technology, providing a solid platform for tackling overseas markets where technology, innovation and responsiveness to customer needs are the cornerstones of business success. This Symposium will play an important part in developing the agenda for the unlocking of the potential in Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity.

I would also draw your attention to the value of having this linguistic and cultural diversity, when we bid as a state, city and nation for the year 2000 Olympic Games only a few years ago. I don't think there was any greater factor in our success in convincing International Olympic Committee members from all of the nations that they represented, and all the sporting federations that they were part of and from all parts of the world, that we as a city, we as a nation had the cultural and linguistic diversity which would make Sydney the place to present the Games of the new millennium.

I extend my congratulations to the organisers, and my best wishes for success of the Symposium. The Government looks forward to being informed of the outcome of your deliberations.