

**Communications, The Information
Economy and the Arts;**

Industry, Science and Tourism;

Finance and Administration

Securing Our Information Future

Securing our Information Future –

Australia is well placed to harness the opportunities arising from the information industries and information economy, to the benefit of all Australians – new jobs, economic growth, new markets for small business, and new futures for regional Australia.

Securing our Information Future

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Executive Summary

A Grasping the Opportunities

The Coalition will grasp the opportunities of convergence and the information economy by:

- increasing funding for the Rural Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund by \$81 million bringing total Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund funding to \$331 million; and
- further developing the Business Entry Point project, allowing small business to conduct online transactions with government 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

B Getting Australians Online

The Coalition will allocate \$36 million from the \$81 million extension to the Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund to establish full nationwide internet access points - this will mean that all Australians will have untimed local call access to the internet.

The Coalition will declare 1999 as "*Online Australia Year*" and fund *The Online Australia Conference* and the *Online Australia Awards*.

C Innovation and Investment in Information Industries

The Coalition has allocated \$28 million over 4 years to support the *Information Industries Action Agenda* to develop a national network of software engineering centres and provide new testing infrastructure.

D Information Technology Infrastructure Outsourcing

The Coalition will continue our Information Technology Outsourcing Initiative to further boost investment, regional development, and most importantly, jobs growth.

E Making The Australian Government a Leading Edge User of New Technologies

The Coalition will:

- deliver all appropriate Commonwealth services electronically on the internet by 2001;

- establish electronic payment as the normal means for Commonwealth payments by the year 2000;
- develop an information management framework incorporating a national navigation initiative and a Commonwealth Information Centre; and
- further develop a high capacity telecommunications network linking all Canberra agencies - *FedLink*.

F Making The Internet Safe and Secure

The Coalition will complete its development of an effective legal and regulatory framework for electronic commerce. By making the internet safe and secure, this framework will contribute to increased business and consumer confidence in the information economy and in turn, increased use of electronic commerce services.

G Introducing Digital Television Broadcasting

The Coalition will lead Australia into the exciting new era of digital broadcasting and datacasting from January 1, 2001, with the implementation of the Government's digital television legislation.

Prior to the introduction of digital in 2001, the Coalition will undertake a review of convergence between telecommunications, information technology, broadcasting and other forms of media.

Labor's Record

Labor failed to:

- introduce the reforms needed to advance Australia into the information age;
- introduce the administrative arrangements necessary to coordinate a whole of government action agenda;
- fund initiatives to increase public access to the internet and online services;
- provide the internet access points required to allow untimed local call access to the internet for those living in regional and rural Australia;

- fund initiatives to improve internet access for people with disabilities;
- encourage consumers and business to embrace the internet and eCommerce;
- develop a strategic vision for Australia's information economy, which would lead Australia into the 21st century;
- boost growth of the information industries; and
- implement a strategy for electronic government service delivery.

Highlights of the Governments Achievements

In its first term, the Coalition:

- allocated \$250 million to the *Rural Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund* – for a wide range of projects including the funding of internet access points providing untimed local call access to the internet in regional Australia;
- fully opened up Australia's telecommunications system to competition, resulting in the advent of new players offering a range of new and cheaper services to business and consumers;
- announced that goods ordered and delivered electronically over the internet will remain tariff/customs duty free and that there will be no 'bits tax' on the internet;
- established a single point of internet access to information about government services as well as a single Business Entry Point;
- encouraged consumers and business to move online through a national promotional campaign;
- funded the *Online Public Access Initiative* which provides community based access to the internet, including much needed services in regional and rural Australia;
- provided \$3 million for *AccessAbility* to improve internet access for people with disabilities;
- established an *Information Industries Action Agenda* to ensure a more rapid development of a domestic industry base in software, information technology services and manufacturing;
- established an *Information Industries Consultative Group* to oversight development of the Action Agenda and to advise on

the implementation of strategies for growth;

- allocated \$28 million over 4 years to support the *Information Industries Action Agenda*;
- established the Australian Electronic Business Network (AeBN) as a joint commonwealth, state and territory initiative supported by industry to encourage awareness of electronic commerce and its adoption by small and medium sized enterprises;
- established the Business Online and Technology Initiative which fosters the uptake of online commerce and business systems, raises awareness of the benefits of online business technologies and supports key demonstration and training projects;
- serving industry, eliminated tariffs on inputs to manufacture of information industries equipment as of 1 July 1998;
- commenced the \$1 billion *Whole of Government Information Technology Outsourcing Initiative* which will: stimulate the Information Technology industry; create employment opportunities in regional Australia; and provide taxpayers with better value for money and higher quality Commonwealth services;
- established a National Year 2000 Steering Committee to raise awareness and coordinate initiatives to increase understanding of and action needed to address the millennium in the private and the public sectors;
- allocated \$120 million towards efforts to address the Year 2000 problem; and
- provided 50 additional industry-based Australian Postgraduate Awards each year at a cost of \$9 million over 4 years to further build industry-university links in information technology related areas.

Our Information Future

A Grasping the Opportunities

In its first term, the Coalition has taken significant steps to improve the co-ordination of information technology matters both within the federal government and with other tiers of government.

The Coalition has appointed the first Minister for the Information Economy; established a ministerial council

comprising the Ministers with responsibilities that impact upon the information technology sector and has established the National Office for the Information Economy, which has co-ordinated initiatives across relevant government portfolios.

To ensure maximum co-operation between the Commonwealth, the states and territories and local government, the Coalition has established the Online Council to ensure a co-ordinated and nationally consistent approach to information technology issues.

The Coalition is conscious of industry concerns that there must be an effective whole of government approach which avoids administrative duplication and promotes effective and efficient policy outcomes.

In its second term, the Coalition will put in place the necessary administrative arrangements to ensure effective cohesion and coordination within the Federal Government and maximum cooperation with other levels of government and industry.

(i) Job Opportunities

The information economy is becoming the most important stimulus to job creation in Australia. We are following the pattern of the United States, where information technology industries have been growing at more than double the rate of the overall economy.

The Coalition recognises the enormous job creating potential in the information industries and is totally committed to capturing these benefits for Australians.

(ii) Small Business

The Coalition Government has moved quickly to harness the benefits of the information age for Australian small and medium sized enterprises.

The Coalition has already made it easier for small and medium sized enterprises to do business with government through the introduction of the Business Entry Point on the internet.

In its next term, the Coalition will improve and expand the Business Entry Point. Small and medium sized enterprises will be able to conduct a large range of online transactions with government from anywhere in Australia- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The Business Entry Point will reduce the complexity and the cost of doing business with government. It will improve access to government services for small and medium sized enterprises in rural and regional areas, allowing them to compete on a more level playing field with city businesses.

(iii) Regional Development

The information economy has the potential to boost jobs and economic growth in regional and rural Australia.

The Coalition is committed to ensuring that regional and rural Australia is able to capture the opportunities arising from the information economy - jobs growth and new markets especially for small business, improved means of communications, and the revitalising of communities.

In its first term, the Coalition provided funding for the five year, \$250 million Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund known as *Networking the Nation* to assist economic and social development of rural Australia.

The Coalition will allocate a further \$81 million over three years to the Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund beginning in the third year of the Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund which commences on 1 July 1999, to be funded out of the proceeds of the further 16% sale of Telstra. \$20 million of this additional funding will be devoted to improving telecommunications services and facilities on isolated islands ranging from the Torres Strait to the islands of Tasmania.

(iv) Education

Australia's highly skilled workforce is one of its most important sources of competitive advantage in the information economy.

The Coalition will pursue a national approach to the development of the workforce skills for the information age across all education sectors and all Australian States and Territories. The effective use of information and communications will be promoted in all education and training sectors, research institutions and industry.

The Coalition will foster increased collaboration between industry and education and training providers to ensure that the latest emerging information technology applications, services, products and computer techniques are featured in current training programs.

B Australia online

The Coalition will make sure that all Australians can seize the opportunities and benefits of the information economy by ensuring that Australians have affordable access to the internet and information economy.

(i) Improved Public Access to the Internet

In its second term, the Coalition will ensure that everyone has untimed local call access to the internet.

Funded from the \$81 million extension to the Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, the Coalition will allocate \$36 million to provide all Australians with untimed local call access to the internet, by establishing an internet local point of presence in every local call zone in the country.

The Coalition will fund the extension of physical internet access points of presence through grants to government and community organisations. The grants program will be carefully managed to ensure that the rapidly developing commercial internet service providers market is not impeded or distorted, and to ensure that the new internet access points provide ongoing choice and high quality service for end users.

(ii) National Awareness Campaign

The Coalition is conducting a \$3 million awareness campaign to ensure that all Australians are alert to the benefits of the information economy.

The national awareness campaign includes:

- a series of leading edge training programs, summits, seminars, forums, and other events to encourage small and medium enterprises to grasp eCommerce;
- a travelling 'Online Laboratory' - to take technology into the Australian community and provide 'hands on' experience for first time users;
- an electronic commerce summit in April 1998, *eCommerce: Enabling Australia*, which attracted internationally acclaimed keynote speakers, and Australian business leaders, decision makers and opinion leaders;
- up to 30 eCommerce summits in rural and regional Australia;
- a Large Corporations Awareness campaign, to encourage Chief Executive Officers and peak industry groups to embrace eCommerce; and
- *Online Australia Day* on November 27, 1998 - to promote the employment opportunities and social benefits of the information economy to all Australians. An Australian Web Expo which showcases Australia's best and brightest to the world will be a centrepiece of *Online Australia Day*.

The Coalition will declare 1999 as "Online Australia Year", providing \$900,000 to fund an Online Australia Conference and the Online Australia Awards.

This program will provide a framework for a year long Australia-wide focus on the information economy. National, regional and local awareness raising and skill development activities will be the primary focus of Online Australia Year.

National and international activities will aim to strategically position Australia as a world leader in the information economy.

Online Australia Year will provide 'hands on' experience to first time users of the internet and encourage Australians to grasp the opportunities and benefits of the information economy.

In addition to the regional eCommerce summits, the Online Travelling Laboratory and other awareness raising activities, the Coalition will host the Online Australia Conference and conduct a national competition to showcase best practice use of the internet and online services:

Awards will be presented in various categories including the community sector, schools, older Australians, telemedicine, e-Commerce, multimedia and small business.

C Innovation and Investment in the Information Industries

Information technology plays a vital role in boosting Australia's competitive strengths. It is essential that Australian business not only has access to leading edge information technologies, but that we continue to encourage the development of a strong domestic information technology industry.

(i) Information Industries Action Agenda

The Coalition has established an *Information Industries Action Agenda* to facilitate the more rapid development of a domestic industry base in software, information technology services and manufacturing. Key areas of priority include:

- access to capital;
- formation and protection of intellectual property;
- commitment to quality;
- developing global scale; and

- orientation towards global markets; and
- fostering a domestic industry environment that strengthens competitiveness, jobs and growth.

The Coalition has provided funding of \$28 million over four years to support the Action Agenda. This funding is being used to develop:

- a national network of software engineering quality centres to provide both software companies and the industry at large with access to the latest software engineering technology; and
- new testing and conformance infrastructure to ensure that Australian information technology firms have access to appropriate test-bed facilities for their products.

(ii) Information Industries Consultative Group

We have established a new Information Industries Consultative Group to oversight development of the Action Agenda and to advise on the implementation of strategies for growth.

The Coalition will move quickly to convene this group after the election and will ensure that it fulfils its role as a high-level source of advice to Government.

(iii) Research and Development

Information technology firms also currently benefit from almost 30 per cent of grant funding allocated under the Coalition's new *R&D Start* program. They are a key target for investment under our new Innovation Investment Funds program which provides start up capital for new high-technology Australian firms.

(iv) Reduced Costs

In addition, we have significantly reduced input costs for domestic industry by eliminating unnecessary tariffs on information technology inputs. This measure will save the industry around \$80 million in reduced input costs over 18 months.

(v) Information Industries Investment Coordinator

The Coalition will strengthen its commitment to the development of a stronger domestic information technology industry by appointing a new *Information Industries Investment Coordinator*, located in *Invest Australia*.

The Information Industries Investment Coordinator will head a strategic focus within Invest Australia to develop and attract new investment in the information technology industries and research in Australia. A key element of this strategy will be a focus on maximising opportunities for the development of home-grown Australian information technology firms.

D Information Technology infrastructure Outsourcing

The Coalition is committed to outsourcing the Commonwealth's information technology infrastructure on a whole-of-Government basis.

In its first term, the Coalition announced the *Whole of Government IT* Infrastructure Outsourcing Initiative. Through this initiative, the Coalition is growing the nation's information technology and telecommunications industry, creating employment opportunities for regional Australia, achieving \$1 billion in savings for the Australian taxpayer and improving the quality of information technology service delivery for Commonwealth agencies.

The Coalition Government recently announced the *Small Agency Program*, which provides an unprecedented opportunity for Australian small and medium sized enterprises to supply the information technology and telecommunications needs for Commonwealth agencies with less than 300 desktops.

In its next term of office, the Coalition will continue the Information Technology Outsourcing Initiative, which will continue to facilitate investment, regional development, and most importantly, jobs growth.

E Making the Australian Government a Leading Edge User of New Technologies

The Coalition Government will unleash the opportunities of the online world by being a leading edge user of new technologies, providing Australians with electronic access to government information and services.

The Coalition will increasingly deliver services electronically as well as in their more traditional paper forms. The Coalition will deliver all appropriate Commonwealth services electronically on the internet by 2001 and establish electronic payment as the normal means for Commonwealth payments by the year 2000.

Through the Office of Government Information Technology the Coalition will:

- develop an information management framework incorporating a national navigation initiative and a Commonwealth Information Centre;
- ensure authorities are Year 2000 millennium bug compliant. All agencies will continue to report quarterly to the government through the Office of Government Information Technology and the government will continue to report publicly on the commonwealth's progress in addressing Year 2000 compliance;
- develop a high capacity telecommunications network linking all Canberra agencies. This secure Intranet link, *FedLink*, will provide significant opportunities for small and medium sized local information technology companies;
- develop a framework which will provide security, privacy and trust in transaction and messaging systems; and
- create an online environment that will benefit Australians, promote industry development, and place Australia at the forefront of world class standards in electronic service delivery.

Electronic service delivery will make it easier for business and consumers to deal with government, particularly for those living in regional and rural areas. Australians will be able to pay bills and search for government information when it suits them rather than having to visit government offices during normal business hours.

F Making the Internet Safe and Secure

The Coalition is committed to making the internet safe and secure, maximising business and consumer confidence in the internet, online services and electronic commerce.

(i) Legal and Regulatory Framework

The Coalition will continue its work towards building a legal and regulatory framework for the information economy.

In June 1998, the Coalition released a progress report, *Building the Information Economy: A Progress Report on the Enabling Legal and Regulatory Framework*. This framework aims to facilitate private sector led development of the information economy, and to increase consumer and business confidence in the security, privacy and reliability of electronic transmissions.

The progress report also outlines a framework for the regulation of internet content.

(ii) Regulation of internet content

In 1997, the Coalition announced a framework for regulating internet content. Under that framework, the primary responsibility for ensuring that offensive content is not allowed on the internet rests with content providers (governed by state and territory laws).

The Coalition is working with the states and territories to ensure there are effective laws to deal with offences by internet service providers who knowingly allow their services to be used for the publication of offensive material.

It is important to have an effective complaints mechanism in place to ensure that when offensive material is located, action can be taken to remove it.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority would be the recipient of complaints and will have the legislative power to take action against internet service providers that refuse to remove offensive material.

The Coalition is considering whether a community Netwatch group should be given the responsibility for monitoring Internet sites, providing community education and information (including informing parents of safe sites and ways of preventing access by children to adult material) and advising on community standards.

The Coalition will continue to liaise with international agencies to prevent the distribution of pornographic material.

The internet service providers agree that there is a need for an effective self regulatory system backed up by legislation.

The Coalition is also supporting content labelling and filtering schemes, as well as community education strategies for parents, teachers and children.

G Introducing Digital Television Broadcasting

The Coalition Government recently passed legislation, which will enable the introduction of digital television broadcasting from 1 January 2001.

The Coalition will facilitate the emergence of convergence and digital broadcasting by making excess broadcasting spectrum available to information datacasters.

In the near future, the Australian Broadcasting Authority will make this spectrum available on a trial basis, and then will auction this spectrum so that potential datacasting applications can commence at the same time as the introduction of digital television from January 2001. Importantly, each of the current broadcasters, including the ABC and SBS will also be able to

use their excess digital television spectrum to offer datacasting information services to their viewers.

The Television Broadcasting Services (Digital Conversion) Act 1998 provides that in the context of introduction of digital television, the Government will develop an action agenda to promote the development of an Australian broadcasting electronics industry. The Government will continue to work through the joint government industry working group to develop the action agenda.

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