



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

---

Hansard 25 November 1999

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Vision for Australia

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.33 a.m.), by leave: I raise the issue of the need for a vision for Australia's future. Many Australians feel let down by the debate about whether or not we should become a republic. I do not intend to revisit that today. I recall that during that debate people asked: what difference will it make to my life? Some could not see its relevance to their standard or quality of life. As we approach the 100th anniversary of Federation, I propose a debate which will affect people's lives—a debate which will shape the future direction of Australia.

We need to develop a long-term vision of what we want to achieve as Australians in the next century, because it is a very ugly, competitive world out there. We must look further ahead than the life of Governments. We need to think about the lives of our children and grandchildren. All Australians should be invited to put forward their suggestions for a national summit at which we can shape a vision of how Australia should develop in the 21st century—a framework for the future. My vision of Australia in the next century is of people having been brought together, united as Australians proud of their way of life in a caring and sharing society.

So the summit should plan to bridge the "great divides" that currently separate us. Once we were one of the more egalitarian countries. But in recent years, the divide between rich and poor has become a chasm in some areas. We must avoid the American disaster where thousands live below the poverty line in caravan parks and ghettos and cannot afford basic necessities while the rich have barricaded themselves behind walled suburbs. My vision is of an Australia where we can all live in decent housing and without fear.

Now we have the new phenomenon in the age of technology—the information rich and the information poor where, unless people switch on to the Internet, they will be powerless. My vision is of Australians having the education and the equipment to be united by their access to information and communications technology. While bitumen and the Internet have shrunk the physical distance between bush and city, the gap between the two communities has grown so that many people living on the land feel more isolated than ever before. My vision is of a shared understanding of the needs and problems that exist in those communities.

And there is that huge divide between Australia's first inhabitants and those of us who arrived in the last couple of centuries. As we approach the new millennium, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders can still expect to die nearly two decades earlier than we do.

My vision is of a respect for one another's cultures and of the present health, education and unemployment problems having been solved. A great wedge was recently driven through our multicultural society, which we have now healed. I know that multiculturalism is one of Australia's great strengths. How can we ensure that never again is this strength threatened with division? There is the great geographical divide between us and the rest of the world. Our past is in Europe, but our future is very much in Asia. My vision is of our redrawing our position on the world map so that we move closer to the rest of Asia and aim for a stronger trade and economic bloc.

Bryce Courtenay alleges that one in three Australian students is leaving school functionally illiterate. Such a divide would condemn a third of our citizens to unemployment and unfulfilment in their lives, depriving them of many simple pleasures. My vision is of a relevant education for our children so that every child has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential, no matter where or how they live.

There are many other issues that the debate should encompass. How much do we value our health and how should we pay for its care? Nothing contributes more to our quality of life than good health. And nothing detracts more from it than ill health. We need to plan for the ageing of the population and the demands that this will place on health services. My vision is of the kind of caring, sharing society where everyone, no matter what his or her resources, receives the same high level of care.

What value should we place on our unique and irreplaceable flora and fauna and the fertile land that supports them? The summit should address, for example, our vision for how we develop and use information technology, biotechnology, rail links, the supply of gas and other industries. It is important for all Australians to be able to make their contributions to such a debate and I would welcome feedback on my web site at [www.thepremier.qld.gov.au](http://www.thepremier.qld.gov.au).

I would be pleased to host this national summit in Queensland, the most decentralised mainland State. I invite other leaders to join with me in supporting such a summit, with the initial planning to be decided at the next meeting of the Council of Australian Governments. I table a copy of the letter I have written to the Prime Minister with this proposal for a meaningful debate on topics which can affect all our lives and for which we need to plan for the next century.

---