



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER
ALP IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS POLICY LAUNCH
MELBOURNE - 18 JUNE 1987

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Fellow Australians,
Friends,

Since I was a student at the University of Western Australia, the capacity of this great country to accept and to give opportunities for a decent life as equals in our society to people from beyond our shores has been a matter of great personal importance to me. It was the vision of Australia, under Chifley and Calwell, opening its doors to settlers from a world ravaged by war, which first inspired me to join the Labor Party.

The quality of life which we are able to offer to our ethnic communities is one of the most decisive measuring sticks by which any Australian Government should be judged. In this area, this Government has one unbeatable advantage over its predecessors and its competitors: in Mick Young, we have one of the great figures of Australian public life, one of the great personalities of the ALP, and one of the very great Immigration Ministers in Australian history.

In launching my Government's immigration and ethnic affairs policy I want to emphasise three points:- we are inspired by the success of Australia's immigration program over four decades and inspired by the role of Labor Governments in that success; we are proud of the record of the present Government over the last four years and we are challenged by the opportunities of the next three years and beyond.

Australia has been immeasurably enriched by the contribution of immigration to our national life and by the success of the immigration program. It is one of our nation's greatest achievements that people have been accepted from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds, race, religion and culture.

We take pride in the role of Labor Governments in the success of the migration program. It was a Labor Government that began the migration program just after the War. It was another Labor Government - the Whitlam Labor Government - which expunged the last traces of discrimination from our migration policy.

It is with that great Labor tradition behind me - that tradition of vision, compassion, courage and fairness - that I speak to you today.

The Government is totally committed to the concept of Australia as a truly multicultural society.

What this means is that we believe that all Australians, irrespective of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, their cultural heritage or their linguistic tradition, should be able to exercise their rights and obligations as full and equal members of the community. We believe multiculturalism is central to any commitment to social justice.

However we need to translate those beliefs and commitments into action. That is ultimately the test of any Government. When I look at the track record of my Government over the last four years, I am proud of what we have achieved.

As with other areas of Government policy, we have got the fundamentals right.

At times this has meant hard and painful decisions but in the end I believe we have established the basis for a multicultural Australia.

The main points I would like to highlight are:

- . An immigration policy which, through community consultation and careful planning, has steadily increased and has given priority to family reunion. My Government has successfully balanced economic, social and humanitarian considerations.
- . The careful development by Mick Young and Susan Ryan, with an input from the Office of Multicultural Affairs, of a National Policy on Languages - a policy designed both to provide opportunities for all Australians to achieve competence in English and to maintain and develop Australia's valuable language resources. At the same time the provision of English courses through the Adult Migrant Education Program has been vastly improved. Funding has increased; new education centres have been established; ancillary child care facilities have been extended; and the teaching staff have been transformed from a casual to a permanent, professional workforce.
- . A commitment to people in need, particularly low income families. In contrast to the fall in real disposable income experienced by poor families under the previous Howard Government, payments have increased in real terms during the period of my Government.
- . Special emphasis, particularly funding increases, in the provision of welfare services to the ethnic aged, migrant women, refugees and ethnic youth.

- The establishment of the Office of Multicultural Affairs within my own portfolio, giving it the opportunity to have a policy input at the highest level of Government.
- The implementation of an Access and Equity strategy, designed to ensure that people of non-English speaking backgrounds have equal access to and an equal share of Commonwealth programs and services.
- Extensive support for ethnic community organisations. Under my Government unprecedented financial support has been given to ethnic community organisations.

Let me repeat that we are proud of our achievements. We have laid a firm foundation for multiculturalism in Australia.

We now look forward to the challenges and opportunities of the next three years and beyond. I wish to draw attention to six major areas of activity in the next three years.

- 1) Implementation of the National Policy on Languages. Already we are committed to an integrated package of initiatives that will allow the on-arrival component of the ESL program to be doubled; provide substantial funding for community, trade and Aboriginal languages; and tackle the problem of adult illiteracy. To meet that challenge we will spend an additional \$15m next year, and \$25m in the following full year. Of these figures, an extra \$5.3m will be available for on-arrival ESL for school-children in 1987-88, increasing to \$13.6m in 1988-89.

I should say that the Government is committed to maintaining sufficient levels of funding flows to general ESL programs, in recognition of the need to ensure that people of non-English speaking background are not disadvantaged in Australian society, and that the education and skills they bring to this country can be fully utilised to the benefit of all Australians.

The national policy on languages is also designed to maintain the community languages that form an indispensable part of the rich ethnic heritage of Australia, as well as improving the quality of our workforce, increasing our tourist potential and allowing us to expand our trading opportunities.

- 2) Production of a Green Paper on immigration. This will examine all aspects of immigration policy including the points system. The Green Paper will be produced in consultation and with the full co-operation of the community, including ethnic organisations.

- 3) Extension of the access and equity strategy. All Commonwealth Departments and agencies will now be required to develop three year plans of actions on measures they are taking to ensure that all Australians, irrespective of their ethnic origin, enjoy a 'fair go' in access to Commonwealth programs and services.
- 4) Drawing maximum benefit from the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Advisory Council of Multicultural Affairs. The Office, which will have a presence in each capital city of Australia, will be required to co-ordinate policy advice, implement the access and equity strategy, provide community information and to consult extensively with community organisations. The Council has been asked by me to translate the principles of multiculturalism into a series of long-term concrete initiatives - a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia.
- 5) Cutting the delays and backlogs in the immigration appeals system. We will do this by increasing the Immigration Review Panel from 32 to 137 members and by setting up, for the first time, new Panels in Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.
- 6) Finally, but crucially important to many of you, we will ensure that with a steadily expanding immigration program priority will be given to the reunion of families.

Those are the main elements of what Labor offers over the next three years. And there is not the slightest possibility that our opponents will go close to matching it.

The importance Mr Howard attaches to these matters can be seen from the fact that his spokesman on immigration and ethnic affairs is not only outside the Shadow Cabinet, but is in fact one of the most junior members of his Shadow Ministry. And this in a Party which has the widely respected Ian Macphee languishing on the backbench.

Moreover, in an environment where the Liberal Party is threatening huge, unspecified cuts of 2.5 billion dollars in Government programs, it is certain that they intend to impose a disproportionate and unfair share of the burden on our ethnic communities. Mr Howard has identified certain areas where his cuts would not fall. Very significantly, ethnic and multicultural programs are not on the protected list. Under the Liberals, they are destined to suffer.

We will not allow this to happen. The Labor Party has made its commitment to multiculturalism, not merely in words but in effective, on-going programs. We will ensure that help continues to go to those who need it. We are not going to be party to any redistribution of public wealth from ordinary Australians to the greedy few in our society. We stand for an Australia, richly diverse but cohesive, in which every Australian, whatever his or her background, can enjoy a fair go.
