



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
CWA NATIONAL CONFERENCE
BRISBANE - 18 JULY 1988**

Your Excellency Lady Stephen,
Dorothy Ross,
Members of the Country Women's Association.

In 1922, the Bushwomen's Conference was held at the Royal Easter Show in Sydney.

From those small beginnings, the Country Women's Association has grown to become the largest women's organisation in Australia, with 56,000 members in all States and Territories. Through its wide network of regional branches, the CWA has worked tirelessly over more than 60 years to improve the welfare of women and their families, especially those living in isolated rural areas.

Country women have always by necessity been self reliant and resourceful. They know what it means to make do, and to get things done. They have coped with floods, drought, recession and, now, they are coping with the impact of changing international economic conditions.

Any study of Australia's rural development would be incomplete without recognition of the vital contribution made by the Country Women's Association - by setting up maternity hospitals and baby health centres, by working over decades for Aboriginal welfare, by seeking better educational opportunities for rural women.

In these and other ways the CWA has always worked, and is still working to ensure country and rural women can participate fully and effectively in all spheres of Australian life.

Nor has the CWA ignored the changes in the Australian economy which are making it necessary for us to become more outward-looking, more competitive in what we do, more diverse in what we produce.

It's a transition which is affecting life in every part of Australia and posing challenges to all Australians.

Advances in agricultural technology mean that farmers now need more sophisticated training to manage their businesses. Changes in communication have also brought the city and country closer together, and have quickened the pace of country life. International tourism is making a rapid and welcome impact on our cities and towns.

Rural women, have been steadily moving to adapt to these changes and they have been greatly assisted in their efforts by the Country Women's Association.

The CWA has shown an active interest in international issues through its affiliation with the Associated Country Women of the World. I have noticed your increasing interest in our Pacific region which was reflected in the Seventh South Pacific Area Conference of the Associated Country Women of the World held earlier this year in South Australia.

For all these reasons I was very pleased to accept your invitation to address this Conference.

Late last year my good friend Dorothy Ross wrote to me about the World Heritage Listing of the Wet Tropics of North-east Queensland. Dorothy pointed out that the CWA is very conscious of the environment and is anxious that the land is cared for. But she expressed the CWA's very understandable concerns about the effect on families in the area of World Heritage Listing.

Australian women - and I think country women in particular - have shown a special concern for our natural environment. Country women have an especially close relationship with Australia's natural heritage, as many of your families derive their livelihood from the earth. You have a natural respect for the abundance of nature, and an appreciation of the fragility that our natural environment often displays with, for example, soil degradation, salinity and drought.

Your awareness of and concern for our natural environment is something my Government shares.

I have responded to Dorothy, and I want to assure you all here today, that through our package of assistance measures my Government will do everything it can to ease any economic hardship faced by families in the region of the World Heritage Listing.

We will create up to 600 jobs this financial year and will be making available up to about \$75 million in assistance over three years. The area is one of unsurpassed environmental magnificence and I am sure that World Heritage Listing will contribute to the tourist potential of the region which will of course itself create additional job opportunities.

A second important environmental matter is the Government's recent decision to control substances harmful to the ozone layer. Just last week Cabinet decided to give effect to the Montreal Protocol on ozone layer protection - in fact we are prepared to go further. For example, agreement has been reached with industry to stop using chlorofluorocarbons in aerosol sprays, for all but limited essential purposes, by the end of next year. We will be consulting with the States and other interested parties on details of the necessary legislation.

Muriel Pagliano, your State President here in Queensland, has written to me expressing the Queensland CWA's support for our moves to protect the ozone layer, and I want to say that your support is most welcome and most heartening.

I want to say a little today specifically about the Government's programs directed specifically at women - because it is a record of achievement of which I am proud and because it is a record of achievement in which the CWA has itself played a significant role.

In Queensland, it's particularly appropriate I should make mention too of the Federal Minister whose responsibility it is to assist me in the development of policies on the status of women - Queensland Senator Margaret Reynolds.

As you would be aware, the Government is continuing to work on the National Agenda for Women - the most detailed, practical and comprehensive strategy ever produced by an Australian Government to achieve equality of opportunity for Australian women.

In keeping with the goals of the National Agenda, the Government set out two years ago to ask rural women what are their major concerns and priorities.

That decision was prompted by a suggestion from Dorothy that we survey the special needs of rural women.

The CWA, in conjunction with the Office of the Status of Women, conducted the survey which resulted in the report "Life Has Never Been Easy". Dorothy and I launched this report in Bathurst last February.

The survey reveals health, education and training, child care and transport - which are basic needs in any community - as specially important for rural women endeavouring to bring up a family without ready access to support services.

Let me today speak briefly on the way the Government is endeavouring to respond to the needs that were identified in the survey.

I have asked departments to develop programs to implement the Action Plans outlined in the National Agenda for Women, taking into account the findings of the Rural Women's Survey and the community consultations that followed it.

Many women identified health care as a priority. The Commonwealth is currently developing a National Women's Health Policy, as part of which the Commonwealth, in co-operation with the States, is funding a three year \$5 million program to evaluate and co-ordinate breast screening trials, and to establish and evaluate cervical cancer screening services, especially in rural areas.

Violence against women and children has been a deplorable part of life that we can no longer tolerate if we are to consider ourselves a civilised nation. Several States have already taken steps to lessen the incidence of this crime, and to assist the victims.

A three year campaign against domestic violence is now underway. A Commonwealth/State Task Force will work together on this complex problem. One aspect will involve making community and women's health workers more aware of the threat such violence poses, and the ways it can be dealt with.

Rural women who responded to the survey identified the need for information as a significant issue for them.

We have responded with the establishment of the Commonwealth Services Information Program, through the Department of Primary Industries and Energy, to provide information to country people about the services and programs available from the Federal Government.

Housing has emerged as another important concern for rural women.

For the aged, and for those on low incomes, particularly if they are sole parents, access to suitable and affordable accommodation can mean the difference between poverty and a life with dignity.

The action plans on housing in the National Agenda for Women will ensure that women are included in housing policy formulation and when considering options for the development of public housing.

Research is now being undertaken on housing needs in rural areas. We will continue to support the work of the Women's Housing Issues Working Party, and to monitor and evaluate the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement.

Through such programs as the Local Government and Community Housing Program, we will encourage new forms of public ownership through co-operatives and other types of community managed housing.

A common theme which emerges from consultation with women throughout Australia is the critical importance of access to education and training in the achievement of full participation by women in our economic and social life.

Since its election in 1983 this Government has made expansion of educational opportunities a priority.

It was a national disgrace that when we came to office only about one-third of our students were staying on at secondary school to Year 12.

As a result of our policies, that proportion is now over one half. By the early 1990s, we hope that two-thirds of our students will be completing their schooling, opening the door to a fuller and more satisfying adult life.

The expansion of the Technical and Further Education system has provided improved access for thousands of Australians living in rural areas. New campuses have been built, others have been refurbished, and the range of courses has been expanded.

As well, the National Policy for the Education of Girls is encouraging recognition of the special needs of girls in rural communities where the range of work and training is restricted.

In the area of child care, which has been a particular priority of my Government, special funding has been made available to family day care schemes serving large rural and remote areas.

I don't think its necessary to list exhaustively every initiative we are taking to respond to the needs rural women have told us they feel.

I don't want to pretend that every problem has been solved or indeed that every problem can be easily solved.

And I especially want to avoid the suggestion that policies which help rural women are somehow separate from the broader policies we are pursuing for economic progress nation-wide.

Those broader policies have produced one million new jobs. They are reducing inflation. They have allowed the achievement of historic welfare reforms such as the Family Allowance Supplement and the Child Support Scheme.

All Australians are better off for these achievements - including rural women and their families.

So in closing I thank you for the support and the constructive criticism you have provided.

I am confident the CWA will continue, as it has in the past, to alert the Government to needs that are current and problems that await resolution.

Together we can continue the task of making a better and a stronger Australia for our children.
