



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURES GROUP
PARLIAMENT HOUSE - 14 MARCH 1991**

When I delivered my Statement to Parliament on Tuesday, 'Building a Competitive Australia', I announced decisions of fundamental economic importance for the future of this country.

I am proud to emphasise the crucial leadership role my Government has played - through decisions such as these - in setting the right policy framework over the past eight years.

But I stressed on Tuesday - and I take this opportunity of repeating today - that success in securing our future ultimately lies in the hands of each one of us.

I said that it would only be with the understanding of all Australians - as individuals and through their representative organisations - that our nation will best meet the challenges ahead.

When, for example, we speak of creating a 'clever country' we speak of a transformation that can be initiated, but that certainly cannot be imposed, by Government.

A truly clever country is one in which each one of us is equipped with the skills necessary to work productively in a modern economy. Unless we are prepared to mobilise this most valuable of all national resources - our human resources - we will surely not be able to become a clever country.

What is true in this general sense for the economic future of this country is equally true in securing the future of our environment.

When I issued my 1989 Environment Statement - 'Our Country, Our Future' - I said that 'its announcements, while comprehensive and vitally important, would not themselves see the job done.' Practical action is required. At the

simplest level, it means Government and individuals must use resources more carefully.

One of the very heartening aspects of Australian life today is the way in which individuals and families are learning to recycle many products in everyday household use, such as newspapers and glass bottles.

We have adopted as an interim planning target the aim of reducing greenhouse gases by 20 per cent by the year 2005.

Whether we attain that goal, too, depends on whether we can modify the behaviour patterns of industries and individual consumers throughout the nation.

I am proud of my Government's environment record. But as I've said several times in the past about issues such as greenhouse emissions, Governments alone cannot take all the action required.

However, I recognise that Governments must provide a lead, and act as a role model. And the extent to which the Government is prepared to lead by example, through better environmental practices, will be a key determinant in the community's willingness to continue such activity.

Today, I welcome the initiative of my colleague Senator Nick Bolkus in establishing the Environmental Futures Group. The Group will identify areas where the Department of Administrative Services can make practical contributions towards a better environment and advise on how it can lead by example.

The Department of Administrative Services, through the Environmental Futures Group, can encourage the use of more environmentally friendly products and energy saving measures within both its own administration and the Commonwealth as a whole. It can also encourage environmental values in industry - for example, the building and construction industries with which Nick's Department is closely involved.

Other advances can be made, through Government purchasing policies, by giving preference to products that are both price competitive and environmentally friendly, and by encouraging the production of goods and services in an environmentally sensitive manner.

It will be some time before we will see a dividend from our efforts. But it is important to maintain our resolve. Changes are necessary at many levels of society for Australia to make substantial progress towards a better environment. We must educate Australians and Australian organisations to understand their responsibilities and how they can make a positive contribution.

In all this, the Environmental Futures Group will have a critical role to play.

I am particularly impressed to see that the members of the Group are drawn from diverse backgrounds. I congratulate George Negus and his team on taking up this challenge. Their willingness to involve themselves in this endeavour shows their commitment to our environment, and to the sort of community action which will be so valuable in the effort to protect our environment. I wish them well in their work.

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