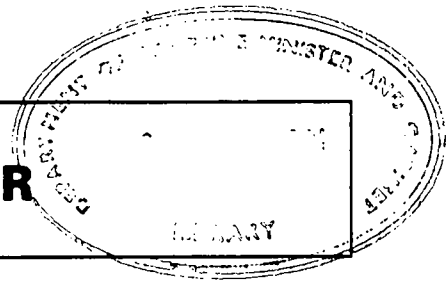




## PRIME MINISTER



FOR MEDIA

30 APRIL 1991

I warmly welcome the significant progress made by Antarctic Treaty Parties in Madrid in negotiating a legal instrument to protect the Antarctic environment.

The Madrid meeting has made a major breakthrough in achieving consensus among key delegations to protect Antarctica in the foreseeable future and to ensure that the continent is given the most comprehensive environmental protection possible.

Since the Government's rejection in 1989 of the Antarctic Minerals Convention, Australia has worked very hard to persuade Treaty parties to introduce stringent environment protection measures for Antarctica.

It has been most gratifying to obtain support in this initiative from France, Belgium and Italy and, in the lead-up to Madrid, from other parties, notably the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan.

The breakthrough achieved in Madrid is a fitting culmination to the intensive diplomatic campaign pursued by Australia and France.

The outcome of the current negotiations has proved that our commitment and efforts to preserve this fragile and beautiful area were worthwhile, and warranted international support.

The draft agreement makes clear the commitment to the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment and the designation of Antarctica as a Natural Reserve devoted to Peace and Science.

It will now be submitted to Governments for approval. I will be urging all Treaty nations to move quickly to finalise negotiations.

The negotiated agreement includes extremely tight provisions prohibiting mineral resource exploration and mining in Antarctica.

Only after fifty years, could any consultative party call a review conference. But any amendment to the mining prohibition would require the agreement of all current consultative parties, of which Australia is one, before it could enter into force.

This means that Australia and all the current consultative parties would effectively hold a veto on mining.

The prohibition on mining in the draft agreement is part of a comprehensive regime for environmental protection for Antarctica. It would include detailed requirements for conducting environmental impact assessments of all activities; the establishment of a committee for environmental protection which will have extensive advisory and recommendatory powers, and measures to ensure compliance with the agreement.