



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP

**LUNCHEON FOR THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS,
THE HON FRANCIS HILLY, MP, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA,
MONDAY, 14 MARCH 1994**

It is my great pleasure to welcome to Australia the Head of Government of the Solomon Islands.

I have been looking forward to seeing Mr Hilly in Australia later this year, when the South Pacific Forum meets in Brisbane.

In fact I have already had the pleasure of seeing Mr Hilly at the forum in Nauru last year, and at CHOGM in Cyprus.

However, those are not really occasions for bilateral discussions such as we have enjoyed this morning.

Australia welcomes talks with the Solomon Islands of the warm and friendly nature we had today. They enable us to explore issues of concern to both countries in some greater depth than a multilateral occasion.

At the forum, I have no doubt Mr Hilly and I will have the opportunity to address regional matters which concern each of us.

That is the Pacific way.

But neighbours in the region must have opportunities to talk within the framework of their own relationship - in this case, a relationship of great warmth which Australia values highly.

I particularly welcome the fact that on this visit, Prime Minister, you are accompanied by a trade and investment delegation from the Solomon Islands.

And that you and the delegation will be exploring ways to expand trade and investment opportunities, with a special emphasis on tourism.

In my first few months as Prime Minister I had the opportunity of visiting Honiara to take part in the South Pacific Forum, which happily coincided with the 15th anniversary of the independence of the Solomon Islands.

While my time was mostly confined to the capital itself, I saw enough of Guadalcanal and the surrounding waters to recognise the value of your attractive environment and the tremendous potential it offers in the long term for tourism.

As I said at last year's forum in Nauru, the promotion of the private sector and the development of export industries will be fundamental to the Pacific's future economic prospects.

Your initiative, Prime Minister, in bringing this business delegation to Australia is a concrete and helpful step in this context.

As you know, trade between us is heavily weighted in my country's favour.

That is not uncomfortable for Australia, but we are prepared to help in encouraging Australian companies to trade with, and invest in, the Solomon Islands.

Your government's commitment to economic reform is, in this regard, most welcome.

The path to economic reform is not easy. I know that because the Australian government has been following it for a decade.

But success in economic reform should also open up opportunities for Australian business, to the benefit of both nations.

However trade links are only one facet of our bilateral relationship.

Australia is your neighbour in the South Pacific, and we consider the region we share to be of vital importance in our foreign policy and security objectives.

My appointment of Gordon Bilney as Minister for Pacific Island Affairs reflects the Australian Government's desire to give even closer attention to the region.

We will be providing some \$11 million this financial year to help, in particular, with education and training.

We also maintain strong links through the Defence Co-operation Program. I enjoyed very much visiting the patrol boat base at Honiara in 1992, and Australia is very pleased to have provided two Pacific patrol boats to help your government protect its valuable fisheries.

We also enjoy excellent people to people contacts, and your invitation to the business leaders who have accompanied you will help promote them.

I have been looking forward, as I said, to welcoming you to Australia again for the 25th South Pacific Forum in Brisbane in August, which represents another aspect of the relationship between our two countries.

I trust we can have a useful discussion there of the economic challenges facing all of us in the region, looking in particular at how to make the best use of our resources.

But I also trust that our bilateral talks this morning have been as useful to you as they have been to me.

And I trust that your current visit to Australia is both useful and enjoyable.