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PRIME MINISTER 20 MARCH

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

THE COALITION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In selecting Senator Rod Kemp as Shadow Minister for the Environment, John Howard has made a truly shocking appointment. Not only are Senator Kemp's views completely hostile to a proper handling of this portfolio, it has now - unbelievably - been relegated from the Shadow Cabinet.

But we should not be surprised. Mr Howard has again demonstrated the Coalition's contempt for national environmental responsibilities and policy making.

Anyone concerned about the environment and casting a vote in New South Wales or Canberra this Saturday, should bear in mind the full significance of John Howard's appointment of Rod Kemp to this portfolio. It demonstrates a disregard for this immensely important area of policy, and the Coalition should be given the message that the community will not wear it.

As an interview in today's Australian confirms, Kemp is blindly opposed to Australia signing up to international treaties. He regards the Commonwealth's use of the external affairs power to make and use environmental treaties to protect our environment as an abuse of the Constitution, and particularly of the rights of States. He wants the States to have the right to veto Australia's accession to international treaties.

The Federal Government's ability to protect our environment depends to an enormous degree on the external affairs power and the international treaties we have entered into. These include the World Heritage and Climate Change Conventions, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

If John Howard and Rod Kemp had their way, those Federal protective powers would be knocked aside. With members around with the instincts of Richard Court and John Fahey, the environmental consequences would be as devastating as they would have been for the Franklin, the Daintree and the Tasmanian Forests in 1987, or the Great Barrier Reef under Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

At that time, under Howard's leadership, the Coalition's environmental policies hit rock-bottom. If he had won that election, he would have abolished the Environment Department, handed over control of Kakadu and Uluru to the Northern Territory, let the Franklin be dammed and logging go ahead in the Lemonthyme and Southern Forests, and only nominated the Wet Tropic rainforests for World Heritage listing if Queensland "approved". All environmental decisions would have been left to the States.

Obviously, nothing has changed.

The Coalition, under the Howard-Kern policy regime, is still wedded to States' rights, at the expense of the national interest and proper environmental protection policies.

CANBERRA

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