

PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH

CANBERRA, ACT

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. William McMahon

31 March 1971

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Parliamentary Colleagues, Chiefs of Staff and Gentlemen;

Prince Philip is very well-known to us and we are delighted he has come back again as our guest to share with us the fiftieth anniversary of the Royal Australian Air Force.

Your personal standard, Sir, is now flying in Canberra. Its four quarters are a record of the events which brought you to your high and responsible place alongside the Throne.

The lions and the cross in the first and second quarters remind us of your ancestors from Denmark and Greece. The fourth quarter contains the arms of the city of Edinburgh.

But, Sir, it is the third quarter of the standard, with its black and white stripes, that has an added interest for many Australians. Many of the locals will claim you as a supporter of the Yass rugby team. Black and white are its colours. If you went to Collingwood, in Victoria, you would get a riotous welcome. Their colours, too, are black and white.

But Sir, I'm sure you'd get the best welcome of all if you went to the Western Suburbs in my own electorate near Sydney. They too play rugby in black and white.

I've heard that Newcastle United in Britain claims your support and that, in fact, you call your personal standard "Newcastle United". Our teams in black and white are called "the magpies" - and I'll stretch the story a bit further, Sir, to recall that your first command was a naval frigate, H. M. S. Magpie.

But names apart, Sir, my advisers tell me that the black and white stripes in your standard are the mark of the Mountbattens - your family name and one of great distinction in the British story.

I hope your standard will fly in this country many times and will always bring with it the same enjoyment as it does today.

Your own family links with the Throne are deep-rooted in history and you have given matchless support to Her Majesty The Queen. Together you have given a new purpose and an involvement to the Crown and the people in this neo-Elizabethan age.

2.

The Crown's adaptability to contemporary life is evident to all of us. It is based, I believe, simply on a compatibility with the world of today and an understanding of the human values and the qualities that make our society what it is.

You are known Sir, not only as a sailor, airman and sportsman, but as a man with a social conscience and a deep and understanding sense of community interest. You have been a spokesman for most good causes and a number of neglected ones.

You have never been - to use your own words - "a sitting tenant in any job". Not once or twice, but every time you have been with us, you have had something inspiring to say.

Your speeches have purpose and point and are candid. They spark off ideas and promote debate with a cutting edge finely honed for each particular subject.

Your appeals for a public conscience on the protection of our wild life and the conservation of our environment have done much to win support for what we want to achieve. It is part of history, Sir, that you managed to have the site of a housing estate in Western Australia changed so that a "noisy scrub bird" - to give it its full name - should not be disturbed, because the species was nearly extinct in Australia.

I am sure you know, Sir, that we have developed plans for a National Advisory Council on Conservation and also have decided to establish a Commonwealth Office of the Environment.

You are an eloquent advocate of conservation and this helps to generate a public awareness of the problem which is one, not for governments alone, but for everyone.

I think, too, Sir, your special interest in young people matches the mood of the times. We want to expand their horizons and their freedoms. By that I mean the freedoms that go with health and physical fitness - education and opportunity. These new frontiers must be explored and fertilised if our young people are to live happy and rewarding lives.

The interest of Australian youth in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme shows they will readily respond to new outlets for their enthusiasms, talents and energies. We value the Scheme - as we value the Commonwealth Study Conference - because it is one of those social movements of the fast-moving seventies that you have sponsored with drive, imagination and more than a bit of blunt speaking.

We don't want Australia to stand still, and, I am sure Sir, neither do you. You have warned that the propaganda of the "stop-everything brigade" is continuous and in the long-run fatal. You have done what you can to make the "start something society" remain active and dedicated. With these goals we all agree.

3.

And - you, Sir, are a family man. Those who have seen you with your family - as so many of us did last year - will know how enjoyable and exciting it can be.

It is a reminder that the family remains the foundation of the good society. When you spoke on television last Sunday you said of the Royal Family :-

"We have to live as people and we have to have a home".

I agree completely. There is no other foundation on which we can build if we want to sustain a free and tolerant society.

Sir, it is refreshing to have you with us for all these reasons and to do honour to the Royal Australian Air Force on its fiftieth birthday. I am specially glad to be associated as Prime Minister with this anniversary, because in 1952 I had the honour to present, on behalf of Her Majesty, The Queen's colours to the R.A.A.F. at Laverton.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a special day for the R.A.A.F. The R.A.A.F. has fought with heroism and distinction over Europe and Africa, across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and in the war theatres of Asia.

This fighting Service is vital to our security because I believe air power to be one of the keys both to survival and to peace.

We are proud that you are here as a Marshal of the R.A.A.F. - and as a member of the Royal Family.

And that you honour this fighting Service by your presence, as we, in this Parliament, honour it, too.

We thank you, Sir, for being with us at this time.
