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PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT SAN NICOLA BALL, PERTH

19 APRIL, 1975

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Thank you very much indeed for the very kind words that you have used about me and my wife. It is a very great pleasure again to be guests of the Association of San Nicola at the Annual Ball.

The last time I was your guest was three years ago and on that occasion I remember undertaking that if I was translated from Leader of the Opposition to Prime Minister, I would see that people who had migrated to Australia, were placed in as good a position as people who had always lived in Australia.

In particular, I remember promising that if anybody in Australia had an age, or an invalid or a widow's pension, then he or she would be able to continue to receive that pension wherever he or she went to live in the world. That is, you wouldn't lose the pension if you left the country. You earned it, you received it.

Now I realise that it will be a long, long time before any of you are interested in pensions. But, nevertheless, it was something that we were able to carry out.

There were some other things we wanted to do for migrants. We were not satisfied that the interest, the responsibility of the Federal Government for migrants, ceased when they arrived in Australia. We wanted to see that when people came to Australia, they would be happy to remain here, they would be happy to become citizens and they themselves would prove the very best advocates for other people to come to Australia. We didn't think it was good enough for the Government always to be looking for migrants. The best people to persuade migrants to come to Australia, were people who themselves had migrated to Australia and had found it a good place to live.

It has given my colleagues and me, the very greatest satisfaction that the number of people being naturalised in Australia, is almost double what it was three years ago and the number of people leaving Australia, is only half as many as it was three years ago.

To give you an indication in this city of what we have tried to do. Quite early in the piece, in February, 1973, we established a migrant education centre in Wapet House, in St. Georges Terrace. This was to make it easy for people

to learn English if they wanted to. There are other things which are being done to see that people at work, or women at home, are able to learn English easily.

To take something more recently - In March last year, we established in Perth the telephone interpreter service, which means that anybody who is not familiar with English, is able to ring up the telephone interpreter service and seek advice about his problems. The Department of Social Security in Perth now has people, welfare officers, on its staff, who can speak Italian. Of course, there are others who can speak other languages as well. I emphasise Italians because they are the people who have come to Australia in greatest numbers after the British and the Irish. Of all the people who have come to settle in Australia, the British are the most numerous, the Irish are the next, and the Italians are third.

The last census in June, 1971, showed that at that time, there were 289,000 people living in Australia who had been born in Italy. Moreover, there have been 160,000 Italian citizens who have been naturalised as Australians in Australia so far. It is a remarkable record. The number of people who have come here and the number of people, who coming here, have decided to become Australians.

In Western Australia, in particular, Italians came earliest and in the greatest numbers. There were, of course, Italians right from the beginning of European settlement in Australia. There was an Italian in the First Fleet that Captain Phillip took to Sydney, and there some in the Gold Rush, of course, later on in Victoria and New South Wales. But until about 30 or 40 years ago, the greatest percentage of Italians in any of the States was in Perth, Western Australia. Most in Perth, but of course, there were gold miners and there were timber getters and so on in the country as well. There is no doubt that Italians have felt that Australia is one of the most attractive countries to go. There are very few countries in the world to which Italians have gone in such numbers. I believe it is true to say, there is no country in the world where Italians have felt so much at home and have been so successful.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we want you to be happy here. We want you to be the great advocates for other people to come to Australia, because people are happiest in Australia, if they already have friends and relatives who are happily established here.

We have made it easier to become citizens. The same conditions apply to people from all parts of the world who want to be citizens. There are the same qualifications, the same period, three years required, and we have made all the conditions easier.

Some of the things which used to be done to discriminate against migrants, have been abolished. It used to be possible, for instance, for anybody who had fallen foul of the law, to be deported if he was a migrant. That is no longer possible. There are no double penalties. There is no discrimination. We have set up in each State, committees, task forces, to make sure that there is no discrimination against any migrants, any particular community within the whole community. In this State, that task force is chaired by my colleague, Mr. Jo Berenson, the M.P. for Perth.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a very great pleasure once again to be your guest. I am happy to be able to come to you and say that I carried out the promises that I made the last time I was your guest.

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