



**PRIME MINISTER**

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ELECTORATE TALK

The Government's desire to conserve Australia's environment continues as a high priority.

Our decisions in relation to Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory and sand mining on the fragile Fraser Island are evidence of this concern to protect Australia's unique environment.

We have also shown an understanding of other sensitive conservation issues.

Many thousands of Australians -- and men, women and children throughout the world -- have long felt deep concern about the activities of whalers.

There is a natural community disquiet about any activity that threatens the extinction of any animal species.

I abhor any such activity -- particularly when it is directed against a species as special and intelligent as the whale.

There are however two distinct views in relation to the activities of whalers.

One view put to me strongly is that all whale species under threat of extinction are protected by moratoriums imposed by the International Whaling Commission and that current policy is in line with the best principles of conservation.

An alternative view which has also been strongly argued to me is that the present practice of killing whales does endanger the whale species. Many other arguments have also been put on both sides.

The Government believed the only fair way to resolve this issue was for an independent inquiry to look at every aspect of whaling, and I announced this course in November last year.

I can now say that this Inquiry will be conducted by an eminent Australian, The Honourable Sir Sydney Frost.

Sir Sydney, formerly a Queens Counsel at the Victorian Bar was Papua New Guinea's first Chief Justice until his recent retirement.

We are keen to see this Inquiry start as soon as possible and I shall be meeting with Sir Sydney tomorrow.

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For this Inquiry he will have the support of scientific advisors and a secretariat, and I expect he will report back to the Government in September or shortly after.

The Inquiry's brief is clear. It will recommend to the Government the best way Australia should carry out its policy of conserving all species of whales.

Specifically, it will be asked to examine whether Australian whaling operations should continue or cease. It will examine the consequences for international whaling arising from our decision.

In preparing terms of reference for this Inquiry the Government was keen to evaluate the views of all parties directly affected.

We received submissions from the Cheynes Beach Whaling Company in Western Australia, the Western Australian Government, Project Jonah and Greenpeace Australia.

It will be open to the Inquiry to hold public sessions and submissions will be sought from the general public, scientific experts, conservation groups and whaling interests as well as Government departments and agencies. The Inquiry will also be able to draw on international expertise.

The Government's concern and involvement in the protection of Australia's wildlife -- much of it unique -- is also reflected by our strong support for the World Wildlife Fund.

The World Wildlife Fund is an international organisation which raises money for projects around the world to help save endangered wildlife and habitat.

It operates from a series of independent national organisations which currently exist in 26 countries.

The Fund hopes Australia will be the 27th country, and the Australian Government is giving its full support and encouragement.

I hope that with the establishment of the World Wildlife Fund in Australia there will be increased resources given to projects to preserve a large number of our wildlife species which are threatened with extinction.

The Fund does not administer conservation projects itself, rather it applies the funds it raises to projects operated by other conservation groups.

During my visit to London last June, I held discussions with Sir Peter Scott, noted ornithologist and Chairman of the World Wildlife Fund.

Last Friday I met with representatives of the Fund, including its Director-General, who reported on discussions they are presently having in Australia prior to formally establishing a branch in our country.

We are hopeful that this can be achieved no later than the end of this year.

The Government will, of course, continue to give every possible support and encouragement to the Fund throughout the year, including in the critical stages of its launching.

As tangible evidence of our support the Government will legislate to make donations to the Fund tax deductible.

Much of Australia's environment, our wildlife and habitat, are unique.

We are determined to preserve our great heritage for present and future generations of Australians and visitors.