



**PRIME MINISTER**

FOR MEDIA

FRIDAY, 12 MARCH 1982

CIVIC RECEPTION, BENALLA

I would like to thank you very much indeed for that welcome. I think we can for an ecumenical movement at least for today and maybe it would be better if it could last for longer than a day. But, it would seem to me that a large part of what we are seeing right here is what Australia is all about. I think we really do believe that this is one of the best countries in the world to live in. I believe it is one of the best countries in the world to bring children up in. There were a number of kids outside a little earlier this afternoon as Tamie and I came in.

It really is a wonderful thing to see a community that is doing so much for itself in partnership if you like, with whatever state and Federal governments can do. The real motivating force for the kind of enthusiasm that you have exhibited Mr Mayor, and for the obvious progress that Benalla has experienced comes from people who live within that community and the government cannot create that, it has to be something in the minds and hearts of people themselves.

I just think because he is departing a political scene, I would like to say that I am glad to see Tom McEwan here. He has been member for this area for what, 21 years and this is the last time that he is standing for this electorate and he will not be standing again on this occasion, and it has been represented in this State over a very long time.

I am glad you mentioned textiles industry and this morning we were at Bruck mills in Wangaratta and we know the importance of the textile industry to many country towns and communities right throughout Australia. It is not only that, I don't really believe I could imagine Australia without a textile industry, so what we wanted to do was to take some decisions that would open industry to a touch of international competition, but also we wanted a decision that would encourage more investment in the industries in Australia so that they would buy modern machinery, modern equipment, become competitive. That indeed is what a significant number of firms in the textile, apparel and footwear industries are now doing as a result of decisions we took about 18 months.

Where I was this morning in Wangaratta at Bruck Mills I was told that they are trying to crash into some export markets and you might think they are going to go to Europe you might think they are going to go the United States, but they are opening offices in Singapore and Hong Kong. That is the kind of imagination and initiative and confidence that we want to see from Australia's industries. I think we know that that kind of thing would not have happened with the motor industries without decisions which seek to balance the competing interests of different groups, different people within the community. Quite obviously we had very much in mind not only the maintenance of an industry, but the impact of that industry on employment, on country towns and communities and on the well-being of Australia. I have been very glad to see how the industry has indeed been prospering since that decision was in fact made.

I appreciate Mr Mayor very much this Civic reception which you are attending for Tamie and to myself. From across the bridge when we saw this magnificent art gallery, we almost thought that we were looking at the Sydney Opera House. If the cost structure was similar and you are free of debt, you certainly need no more help from the Commonwealth. We are looking forward to seeing the collection you have in this Gallery in a few moments time.

The Mayor has said everything about Benalla. He has made it very plain that the city is moving ahead, but everyone here knows that it is in the centre of a vastly important rural area and people may not know that rural areas in this state have been expanding their production at a greater rate than in any other state. I don't know if I could say that tactfully in Queensland or Western Australia because the Premier of Queensland might not like that being said. It happens to be true. So many things have happened in Victoria over the years that I think we have tended to take what happens in the state very much for granted. We forget that there are great resource developments in Loy Yang which have gone on, what over 60 years, that the largest construction project in Australia happens to be taking place in Loy Yang right at this moment in the development of adequate power for this State. I cannot develop that point Mr Mayor, or I will cease to be ecumenical.

Family incomes, household income in this State is higher than in any others. Savings in this state are higher than any of the others. While we know there are problems at the moment facing people at the moment who want to buy a home, over the years home ownership has been higher in this state than in any other state. These are all objectives which I am sure all Victorians would want to maintain in the years ahead because again it gets back to what this country is all about, the kind of lives that families and children, that people, whatever they want to do are able to do in the State Victoria or in the wider Australia.

I believe that all of you must be enormously proud of what has happened, of what you have been achieving in Benalla. This is in a sense just a small part of what is happening right across Australia because the sort of things that you are so proud of here, that you are doing so well to improve life in and around Benalla is happening in many other parts of the country, in this State and in other states of the Commonwealth. That again is what Australia is all about. I sometimes think it would be interesting if we could preserve, and maybe you have already done it, in Benalla and every country town and in a few places in the city of Melbourne, in Sydney and whatever, the kind of home people might have moved in in 1946 or 1947 with the kind of equipment that went into that home and then the kind of home that gets built in 1982 or 1983 with the kind of equipment that young Australians expect to be in that home, probably in many cases from the day they first move into that home.

I can remember, it is meant to be an all-electric state and we bought a farm in Western Victoria having been told that the SEC would be there in two or three years. About 25 years the SEC arrived. They do a wonderful job once they come. There was a Coolguardie safe. I wonder how many people here, none of those kids outside would know what a Coolguardie safe, but I wonder how many people here know what a Coolguardie safe is? I suppose, well there are some who do and then we manage to get by fair means or foul a small electrolux kerosene refrigerator and we thought that paradise had arrived especially as it came before one particular Christmas. That just is a very small way in which things have changed. I think would not hurt to have it on record for those kids outside, and for people who cannot possibly remember what it was like, what average homes were like, 30, 35 years ago or whatever, or even 20 years ago so they can see the contribution that their parents have made over the years to building up the standard of life, the quality of life, the quality of people's homes in this country.

Indeed, I guess you would only have to look at a model of Benalla at the same time in 1946 it probably would not be one half, one quarter, one tenth of the place that it is today. What has happened in the intervening time is a tribute to the kind of work and efforts that many mayors, many councillors and many citizens and private people have put into building something better over the years.

Most of us have such a good life in this country that we really do take it for granted and we don't understand the changes that have been made, that it has sometimes come at cost, but that those changes over the years are enormous and significant and the important thing is that those changes are significant in terms of the way ordinary, average decent Australians are able to lead out their lives in this country because that really is what it is all about.

Mr Mayor, thank you very much indeed for hospitality and your generosity to Tamie and myself.