



# PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

MONDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 1982

## GREENING OF AUSTRALIA, SYDNEY

For a long while the new settlers came to Australia when they found a good bit of land one of the first things they did was to cut all the trees down or to ringbark them and seek to leave some open space. They had the view which they thought was right then, but which we now know is very misguided. They thought cutting the trees down made the land more productive, you could carry more sheep or carry more cattle or grow more wheat and they did not realise that in part at least, they could be doing very great damage to the land which they then thought they were improving. You can still see in many parts of Australia forests of dead trees which result because of those earlier bad farming or pastoral practices.

There are other things of course which have reduced tree cover in Australia, repetitive drought and that is one of the things that we are experiencing now, again there is the question of disease. Over large parts of Australia native red-gums are suffering very greatly from a disease which nobody really knows what to do about. If they do know what to do about it, the cost would be something that farmers certainly would not be able to support at the present time. One of the good things that has come out of the last five, ten, fifteen years is a much greater awareness of the need to preserve Australia's natural environment, of the need to preserve the value of our soil and of our countryside. We know that this is not just a question of making sure that the beauty of the landscape is preserved for future generations, that it does other things such as improving the quality of air in cities and adds generally to the quality of Australia and of Australian life.

So there is much to be done. The Decade of the Tree, supported by the United Nations is something which Australia is involved in and will be increasingly over the next few years. There is a much greater awareness that those early farming practices in case my farming friends attack me for criticising them, they are practices which I think went out many, many years ago, but the results of bad practices sometimes flow through long after the practice has ceased. In more recent years of course, there are many people who live in the countryside and who have themselves initiated quite significant tree planting programs on their own properties. They realise the damage that was done in earlier times and have as individuals, and sometimes as communities done a great deal to put the matter right.

It is not something that can be left to just individuals. A national tree planting program I hope very much will be part of the bicentennial activities and as a pilot program, some funds have been made available through this year, around \$500,000 so that we can work out better what we will want to be doing as part of the bicentennial program. I would personally like to see a situation in which in the two or three years before the Bicentenary you could have one or more trees planted for every person in the community. That would be something which would leave a legacy of great value for future generations. It would need a great deal of work, it would need a great deal of planning because the Australian countryside is also littered with the examples of local government bodies having planted avenues of one form or another, but then those avenues don't come to very much because the tree selection was not right for the particular soil or the climate or the conditions and maybe because care for those trees was not adequate in the early stages.

So there is much to be done. If there is to be a national tree planting program, it is not going to be just a question of having enough plants available to in a sense cover Australia, people are going to have to know which is the right kind of tree to plant in their particular area, in their particular piece of soil or along a particular stretch of road. A great deal of very careful planning would need to go into all of that.

The program's objectives are obviously going to be to promote conservation, to promote the regeneration and to promote tree planting and to increase the public awareness of the need for trees and to increase the public awareness of the role that trees themselves play in improving the quality of the atmosphere and the quality of life in Australia. It is not just a matter of beauty, it is a practical matter in addition.

A lot is being done. It is being co-ordinated with the United Nations Year of the Tree and a valuable contribution is being made by the United Nations Australia Association and there is government support for that. There is co-ordination with the United Nations Australia Association Decade of Trees Greening Australia and we do want the whole community to be involved. There is a Greening Australia Marketing Company designed to generate funds to help again pursue these objectives in the few years ahead of us.

The Commonwealth, as I think you know, made \$500,000 available through this year for a pilot program as indicated, but to mark the Decade of the Tree in Australia and I have got a cheque of \$55,000 to the United Nations Australia Committee to support that Committee's efforts in this particular objective and we hope also that there will be private contributions as time passes. I hope very much over the next two or three years we will be able to see the initiation of programs which will if not reverse tree decline in Australia, at least make a very great contribution to reversing the decline of trees in Australia. I have very great pleasure indeed in launching the Greening Australia Marketing Company and in handing over the cheque for \$55,000.