



## PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

1 July 1983

The Federal Government welcomes the High Court judgement which confirms the Commonwealth's powers to act to preserve the wilderness of South West Tasmania.

The importance of this area, which contains some of the last temperate wilderness in the world, has been recognised internationally as part of the world's natural and cultural heritage through its listing in the World Heritage Register.

Now that it is clear that the Commonwealth Government has the necessary power, we will move promptly and responsibly to ensure that the wilderness of the World Heritage area is preserved for all present and future Australians and for the world. The decision also protects a significant part of Tasmania's Aboriginal heritage.

I am writing to the Tasmanian Premier, Mr Gray, offering Commonwealth financial support to ensure that the persons presently employed on the Gordon-below-Franklin dam project are properly looked after, through income maintenance for up to one month while alternative employment opportunities are found.

The Federal Government will also take appropriate steps to protect the interests of contractors engaged on the project.

The details of the Federal Government's offer to Tasmania will be made public after it has been received by Mr Gray.

We appreciate that this has been a very difficult problem for the Tasmanian Government and for many Tasmanians.

The Federal Government recognises that the Tasmanian Government acted in what it believed was the interests of Tasmania.

Now that the issue has been resolved, I give our unequivocal assurance that the Federal Government intends to work in a fully co-operative spirit with Tasmania in the conservation and management of the wilderness area, and in the development of alternative strategies for Tasmania's economic advancement.

I have no comment to make on the wider implications of the High Court's decision on the powers of the Commonwealth. But I can say that we will always prefer to act co-operatively with the States rather than, as in the present case, being forced to assert the Commonwealth's constitutional powers.

There need be no fear of a rush to extend Commonwealth activities into new areas as a result of the High Court's decision. That would be totally at odds with our consensus-building approach to Government.