

EMBARGOED



AGAINST DELIVERY

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PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER - FOUNDATION STONE CEREMONY
NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE, 4 OCTOBER 1983

I AM HONOURED TO BE TAKING PART IN THIS IMPORTANT CEREMONY, SYMBOLISING AS IT DOES OUR CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN THIS GREAT NATION OF OURS.

ALTHOUGH A RELATIVELY YOUNG NATION, WE HAVE INHERITED A FINE TRADITION OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

THIS IS AN OCCASION TO REAFFIRM OUR BELIEF IN THE PRIMACY OF PARLIAMENT IN THE AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM.

ALTHOUGH THE PARLIAMENT HAS COME UNDER CRITICISM OVER THE YEARS SINCE FEDERATION, IT REMAINS OUR PRINCIPAL VEHICLE FOR ENSURING THAT GOVERNMENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE AND RESPONSIVE TO THE WISHES OF THE ELECTORS.

THE ESSENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENT IS THAT THE WHOLE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT MUST BE OPEN TO SCRUTINY, OPEN TO CRITICISM AND, FINALLY, OPEN TO THE JUDGEMENT OF THE ELECTORS.

LIKE ALL NATIONS WHICH HAVE ADOPTED THE WESTMINSTER SYSTEM OF RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT, WE HAVE EVOLVED OUR OWN STYLE - ONE ADAPTED TO OUR NEEDS AND NATIONAL CHARACTER.

THERE ARE, AND SHOULD BE, OTHER AVENUES FOR KEEPING GOVERNMENTS IN TOUCH WITH THE COMMUNITY AND ENSURING THEIR PARTICULAR ACTIONS ARE ACCOUNTABLE.

THIS GOVERNMENT IS ESPECIALLY KEEN TO DEVELOP A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION WITH THE COMMUNITY ON PARTICULAR ISSUES OF CONCERN. THE SUCCESS OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT, WHICH WAS HELD IN THE PRESENT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, EMPHASISES THE VALUE OF FRESH CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION.

IN AN OPEN SOCIETY THE PARTICULAR ACTIONS OF GOVERNMENT, AS THEY AFFECT INDIVIDUALS AND SECTORS OF THE COMMUNITY, HAVE TO BE MADE ACCOUNTABLE - BY CRITICISM IN THE MEDIA, BY REDRESS IN THE COURTS, BY COMMUNITY GROUPS PURSUING THEIR SPECIAL GRIEVANCES DIRECTLY WITH GOVERNMENT.

BUT NONE OF THIS DETRACTS FROM THE TRADITIONAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENT AS THE CENTRE OF POLITICAL LIFE.

THE PARLIAMENT IS, AND - I TRUST - WILL ALWAYS BE, THE HIGHEST PUBLIC FORUM IN THE LAND. ONLY IN THE PARLIAMENT ARE BASIC POLITICAL ISSUES DEBATED AS A MATTER OF COURSE.

IT IS ^{THE} PLACE WHERE GOVERNMENTS ARE PUBLICLY AND CONTINUOUSLY ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR STEWARDSHIP.

IT IS THE PLACE WHERE THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, AFFECTING THE WHOLE PATTERN AND DIRECTION OF OUR NATIONAL LIFE, ARE SUBJECTED TO THE CLOSEST SCRUTINY.

IT IS THE PLACE WHERE MINISTERS ARE INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY ANSWERABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS, BOTH CONSTITUTIONALLY AND POLITICALLY. ULTIMATELY, THE GOVERNMENT MUST FACE THE PARLIAMENT BECAUSE THE PARLIAMENT ALONE HAS THE RIGHT TO APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE LEGISLATION AND THE FUNDS WHICH ARE THE MEANS BY WHICH A GOVERNMENT GOVERNS AT ALL. THROUGH THE PARLIAMENT, AND MOST PARTICULARLY THROUGH THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE FINDS EXPRESSION.

THE PARLIAMENT IS THE PLACE WHERE THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA CAN SEE THEIR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, THEIR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS AND SENATORS WORKING ON THEIR BEHALF.

IT IS THE PLACE WHERE ALL AUSTRALIANS FEEL FREE TO VISIT, WHETHER FOR A SPECIFIC MATTER OF BUSINESS OR SIMPLY TO SEE THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AT FIRST HAND.

THE DESIGN OF THIS NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE AND ITS SITING IN THIS PROMINENT LOCATION IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL MUST ENHANCE THE TRADITIONAL PLACE OF THE PARLIAMENT IN OUR SOCIETY.

THE PHYSICAL EXCELLENCE OF THE DESIGN CANNOT BY ITSELF ENSURE THAT PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY WILL FLOURISH, BUT THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT THE FACILITIES TO BE PROVIDED BY IT FOR POLITICIANS AND THE PUBLIC GENERALLY, MUST CONTRIBUTE TO THE QUALITY OF THE ENDEAVOURS OF MEMBERS AND THE QUALITY OF THE ACCESS TO MEMBERS BY THE PEOPLE THEY REPRESENT.

THE NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE WILL, WITH ITS GREAT PUBLIC AREAS WHICH WILL ALLOW VISITORS TO SEE AND FEEL THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS, MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF OUR STYLE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

IT REFLECTS THE INFORMALITY OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHARACTER WHILE MAINTAINING THE DIGNITY WHICH THE INSTITUTION ITSELF DESERVES.

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IS AT THE HEART OF THE SYSTEM OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

MY GOVERNMENT CAME TO OFFICE COMMITTED TO A PROGRAM OF ELECTORAL REFORM AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. NOT CHANGE FOR THE SAKE OF CHANGE, BUT CHANGE IN THE BELIEF THAT OUR NEEDS COULD BETTER BE CATERED FOR.

RECENTLY THE JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM TABLED ITS REPORT.

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THAT COMMITTEE HAS MADE A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND HAS, I BELIEVE, MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO INFORMED DISCUSSION ON THESE MATTERS.

SOME OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS - RELATING TO PROPOSALS FOR A LONGER PARLIAMENTARY TERM, SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS AND AN INCREASE IN THE SIZE OF THE PARLIAMENT - HAVE ALREADY BEEN THE SUBJECT OF A GREAT DEAL OF DISCUSSION.

MANY OF THEIR PROPOSALS HAVE MERIT AND WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR PARLIAMENT.

THERE MUST BE DEBATE ABOUT THE MERITS OF CERTAIN SPECIFIC PROPOSALS. I HOPE THAT A CONSENSUS CAN BE FORGED - UNITING MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS - AROUND A PACKAGE OF MEASURES WHICH WILL MAKE THE PARLIAMENT NOT ONLY MORE TRULY REPRESENTATIVE BUT MORE EFFICIENT IN REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE.

MR CHAIRMAN, IT IS A SINGULAR PERSONAL HONOUR TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS IMPORTANT CEREMONY. BUT THE SYMBOLISM IN THE LAYING OF A FOUNDATION STONE OVERSHADOWS ANY PERSONAL FEELINGS.

THIS STONE SYMBOLISES OUR CONCEPTS OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY; IT REPRESENTS THE BASE ON WHICH WE MAY CONTINUE TO BUILD AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY.

I WANT TO PAY TRIBUTE TO ALL THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS MAGNIFICENT ENTERPRISE. WE ARE NOW SEEING THE REWARDS OF THEIR LABOURS.

I AM ADVISED THAT THE BUILDING PROGRAM IS PROCEEDING VERY SATISFACTORILY - INDEED, THAT IT IS NOW AHEAD OF SCHEDULE. THIS IS DUE IN PART TO THE HARD WORK AND DEDICATED EFFORT OF ALL THOSE INVOLVED - I COMMEND THIS.

WE ALL LOOK FORWARD TO THE COMPLETION OF WHAT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE AUSTRALIA'S PREMIER BUILDING.

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