



# PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF  
THE PRESIDENT OF IRELAND  
HIS EXCELLENCY DR PATRICK HILLERY AND MRS HILLERY  
CANBERRA - WEDNESDAY 5 JUNE 1985

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Mr President, Mrs Hillery, Mr and Mrs Barry, Ambassador and Mrs Small, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

This is indeed an historic occasion.

You, Mr President, are the first Head of State of Ireland to visit Australia.

Your visit is welcomed by the Government, and by the Australian people, not least by the five million Australians with some Irish in them.

Any Australian who wishes to understand his country must have an appreciation of Irish history and culture.

Since the first settlement in 1788 the Irish have made a distinctive contribution to Australian life.

The Irish contribution to Australian politics has been extraordinary. A number of my predecessors have been of Irish descent: Scullin, Lyons and Fadden, for example, and, of course, Curtin and Chifley, the two Australian Prime Ministers whom I particularly admire as leaders, who fought especially hard for the rights of ordinary Australian men and women.

Today more than half the Members of my Ministry are of Irish descent, and three of the six State Premiers have Irish antecedents:

For a century and a half, the Irish in Australia were a significant minority in a society dominated by English connexions and traditions. They were the ones who

questioned and challenged attitudes to the prevailing culture and religion. They sought and achieved a nation broad and tolerant enough to include them as they were, tolerant enough to accept those aspects of life they considered most important.

This Irish contribution to the Australian ethos, was, at the time of its making, often vigorously criticised and sometimes fiercely resisted.

I recall particularly the establishment and development of the Catholic education and welfare systems, the controversies surrounding the place of religion in politics which began in the 1840's and only subsided in the relatively recent past, the conscription controversies of the First World War, the interaction between capital and labour and, arising from this, most importantly, the foundation and achievements of the Australian Labor Party, in which the Irish tradition has always been a vital one.

There are two particular characteristics of this Irish contribution to contemporary Australia that are worth emphasising.

The first is that the tensions and divisions generated by the religious, social and political controversies in which Irish Australians were involved proved over the longer term to be of a creative rather than a destructive nature. No lasting bigotry or sectarianism remains in Australia. The outcome, rather, has been a constructive and protective Australian political system, a system in which a continuing and vigorous debate about the kind of society Australia should be can take place.

In this way, the Irish made a most important contribution both in ensuring personal liberties in Australia and in the development of a distinctively Australian identity which encompasses the many nationalities that have made this country their home.

Another hallmark of the Irish in Australia has been their concentration on Australian, rather than Irish, issues. It was the Irish, more than any other national group, who first rejected the idea of Australia as simply 'a new Britannia in another world' and compelled others to become conscious of Australia's different origins and culture. They did this by seeking to encourage in Australia the development of a unique national consciousness.

At the same time, Irish Australians never forget their essential Irishness. This was reflected in the Irish social and cultural life that flourished in Australia

during the peak years of Irish migration and in the special affection which the many Australians of Irish descent continue to have for the homeland of their forefathers.

It is apparent in our vigorous literary tradition, from Marcus Clarke to Tom Kenneally, in folk songs like Wild Colonial Boy and Moreton Bay: and also, importantly, in the origin of Australian Rules Football in Gaelic Football. I am sure we both wish the recently inaugurated international competition between Australia and Ireland well.

In all this the Irish have set a standard for the healthy diversity that now characterises Australian life and institutions - a standard whereby national groups do not abandon the distinctive cultural traditions of their homelands but which upholds their primary interest, as Australians, with Australia's present and future role and with making the most of the opportunities which living in this country provide.

Ireland has decided that its modern destiny lies in Europe, a decision with which you, Mr President, were closely associated. Australia sees its future in our successful integration with the Western Pacific region.

Nevertheless, today, both our countries recognise the importance of our interlocked histories to our continuing relationship.

Australia appreciated Ireland's hosting of the first Australian Bicentennial Conference in Kilkenny in 1983.

Our Government has recognised the value of the connection with the creation under the Whitlam Government of the Chair of Australian History at University College, Dublin, and the grant announced on St Patricks Day this year to secure the future of the Chair.

We hope that on the basis of our links the Irish Government will be a major participant in our Bicentenary in 1988.

We look forward to continued co-operation in the cultural and tourism area and should continue to look for opportunities to co-operate in the pursuit of shared political ideals as well as for mutually beneficial openings in the economic sphere.

**Mr President**

**Your visit has brought into focus the unique Irish contribution to our nation and our national ethos. It has not only caused the hearts of our Walshs, Kellys, Murphys, Duffys, Keatings, Ryans and O'Reillys to swell with pride, but it has also brought to the rest of us an appreciation of that contribution.**

**I hope that you will take back with you to Ireland a feeling of pride in the achievements of the Irish in this land, and the knowledge that your country will always have a special place in our hearts and minds.**

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