



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

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ARRIVAL OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
RAAF BASE, FAIRBAIRN - 24 NOVEMBER 1986

Your Holiness,

Welcome again to Australia.

On behalf of the Australian people and Government, may I extend to you our best wishes for a most successful visit. It is an honour to have you here and a pleasure to know that over the next few days you will experience at first hand the great warmth and respect that exist for you in this country.

Since you left Rome on 18 November we have watched your progress towards our country with a growing sense of excitement, knowing that awaiting you here was an enthusiastic and heartfelt welcome.

For you come to us as a man for all people. Of course you are here as the beloved pastor of the people of the Catholic faith in particular. But all Australians will welcome you as a prominent and respected messenger of the universal values of peace and of hope and of justice.

So the Government is very pleased that you have been able to accept our invitation, and that of the Australian Catholic Bishops, to visit our country and meet our people.

This is only the second time Australia has hosted a visit by the head of the Roman Catholic Church. Your distinguished predecessor, Pope Paul VI, paid an all-too-brief visit to Sydney in 1970. So we are delighted to welcome you at the outset of such a long tour which will bring you into contact with such a large number of Australians in so many parts of this great continent.

This is of course not your first visit to Australia. Thirteen years ago, as a Cardinal, you attended the International Eucharistic Congress in Melbourne. But on this occasion, you will visit all our States and Territories. You will cross the country from coast to coast, from East to West, and from Tasmania in the south to the Northern Territory. You will see at first hand the heart of our country.

This great expedition will allow you to meet the young and the old, the sick and the disadvantaged, people of many faiths, our Aboriginal people and those who have come from other lands to join the Australian community.

The depth and extent of your pastoral concern for the people of Australia are evident through the strenuous and full schedule you are undertaking in the next six and a half days. Indeed, your Holiness, you are undertaking an itinerary which would be daunting to a man with less energy and commitment.

You have the Government's fullest support in your efforts to meet, encourage and inspire all Australians.

I know that during your meetings with us you will find openness and friendship and great enthusiasm about your presence among us.

I wish you a most rewarding and memorable stay.
