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## PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY

LAUNCH OF ENVIRONMENT BOOKLET  
DAINTREE - 17 JUNE 1987

Warwick Pursar, regional director of the Far North  
Queensland Promotion Bureau,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to be speaking today in the  
Daintree Forest - one of Australia's, and the world's,  
greatest natural assets.

This rainforest is a dramatic illustration of the heavy  
responsibilities that are imposed on Governments, on  
industry, on individuals - on the whole community - by the  
need to protect the environment.

For Australians, that need is a particularly important one  
since we have the good fortune, and the privilege, of living  
in a continent of unsurpassed environmental magnificence.

Indeed, the protection of our natural heritage is an  
integral part of our obligation to our children and to  
future generations.

Today, Daintree symbolises the stark differences between  
those who seek to preserve and protect that heritage and  
those who seek to squander and destroy it.

The environment can only be destroyed once. But when it is  
safeguarded, the benefits are permanent and will be  
appreciated by generations to come.

However, protecting the environment also requires us to find  
a delicate balance with legitimate economic interests.

I believe I can point with pride to the progress my  
Government has made in striking that balance and in securing  
our environmental heritage.

Perhaps of greatest relevance to our presence in Daintree, I  
am proud to reaffirm today my Government's commitment to  
move towards nominating these wet tropics of north-east  
Queensland to the World Heritage List.

Negotiations between the Commonwealth and the Queensland Government over the conservation of these forests have been going on for ten months now.

The Queensland Government persisted in its demands that logging of the rainforests should continue.

This was, and is, unacceptable to us.

The process of nominating these forests to the World Heritage List will involve continued consultation with the Queensland Government and other interest groups.

This consultation process with Queensland will include further consideration of the initiatives already offered by the Commonwealth under the National Rainforest Conservation Program. These initiatives will be intended to promote alternative industries such as tourism and plantations which can maximise new job opportunities and ensure that no parties or individuals are disadvantaged.

But we are determined that the outstanding values of this area be protected.

And that determination is clearly shared by many parts of this community.

I am grateful to Warwick Purser for his warm words of welcome - and in particular for making the very important point that World Heritage listing will not just protect the environmental values of the rainforest but will also protect and enhance its economic values.

Despite some party political differences which may have separated us on other issues, we are all united in the knowledge that listing the Daintree will attract tourists from around Australia and from around the world.

As proud as I am of our determination to protect the Daintree, it has to be seen in the framework of our record, established over more than four years, of environmental protection around Australia.

We stopped the Franklin Dam.

We nominated stage two of the Kakadu National Park for the World Heritage List. We made mining the park illegal.

We have made logging the Lemonthyme and Southern Forests in Tasmania unlawful pending an inquiry into viable alternatives. We have taken this matter to the High Court and Tasmania's legal representatives have agreed to a moratorium on forestry operations in these areas.

We saved Shelburne Bay in North Queensland from mining.

We have continued the National Tree Program and have established the National Rainforest Conservation Program.

We are cooperating with three State Governments to help stop the deterioration of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Many of these achievements and the conservation strategy which lies behind them are summarised in the booklet I am launching today, prepared by my colleague the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Environment, Barry Cohen.

The booklet is a quick reference guide to a government which has taken its responsibilities seriously to preserve the environment - and which remains committed to those responsibilities.

All this stands in the starkest possible contrast to the Opposition parties.

Their prescription for the environment is, simply, horrifying.

Mr Howard has signalled his intention to gut the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service; remove the annual grant to the Australian Conservation Foundation; terminate all grants made under the National Estates Grants Program; and, unbelievably, abolish the Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment.

Words fail to describe the catastrophic social, economic and environmental consequences of such reckless decisions.

Mr Howard describes these actions as cost savings, but they only thinly disguise a philosophy towards conservation that is alien to a majority of Australians.

Indeed, it is alien and repugnant to the traditions of his own party, which in the early 1970s, under McMahon, was able to claim the credit for establishing the Department of the Environment in the first place.

Right through McMahon's government, through Whitlam's government, through Fraser's government, the Australian environment has been safeguarded by the existence of a Department of the Environment.

Now John Howard proposes to abolish it - in a frantic search for funds to pay for an irresponsible tax policy.

We have called that tax policy shortsighted - but to stand here in the Daintree rainforest and to realise it may be sacrificed to pay for that reckless policy truly defines the essence of shortsightedness.

There must be many Liberal supporters who know that under their current leader, Australia would go backwards towards the environmental Dark Ages.

Many Liberals must be appalled at the prospect of mining Kakadu, vandalising our forests, selling off the Barrier Reef, and destroying the sand dunes of Shelburne Bay and Moreton Island and Fraser Island.

Yet these nightmares could come to life under a conservative government.

Those same Liberals must be asking themselves further: How could those acts of vandalism be prevented after a Howard government had abolished the Department of the Environment?

To those Liberals - and indeed to all Australians who have the interests of the environment at heart - I can only say: look at our record, look at the Opposition's promises to let the vandals rip - and help us to prevent the Liberals' environmental disaster from occurring.

Here in the Daintree, it is my duty to reaffirm our determination to prevent that disaster - and to continue protecting Australia's unique heritage for the generations of Australians to come.

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