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ENERGY



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
POINT NEPEAN HANDOVER CEREMONY
PT. NEPEAN - 18 SEPTEMBER 1988**

Premier John Cain,
Joan Kirner, Minister for Conservation,
Forests and Lands,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

For the past one hundred and eleven years the people of Victoria have been unable to enjoy the magnificent landscape of Point Nepean because this spectacular piece of Victoria's natural environment has been devoted to defence purposes rather than to recreation.

In 1877 the land was gazetted to allow the Army to build fortifications here.

Those were the days when the fleet of the Russian navy was expected any day to appear through the Heads. Forts were built here and at Queenscliff, Williamstown and elsewhere in Port Phillip so that during the 1890s, the era of Marvellous Melbourne, it was claimed that Port Phillip was the most heavily defended port in the British Empire south of the equator.

Upon Federation in 1901 the Commonwealth acquired the land and Point Nepean came ultimately to be devoted to the Army Officer Cadet School.

Now that the cadets have been transferred to Canberra the land has at last been freed up so that - with the exception of the parcel being retained for the Army School of Health - this land can be returned to the people of Victoria.

So it is a very great pleasure to be here and to hand over this land to the people of Victoria and to join with my friend and colleague, John Cain, in opening Point Nepean Park.

Point Nepean Park is a project in which the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments have co-operated closely and well to provide the public with access to a beautiful part of Australia's natural heritage.

This is an important site in the history of this State and of this nation - especially because of the unique role it played in the First and Second World Wars.

Point Nepean fortress was operated and staffed from 1892 until the end of the Second World War. But only two angry shots were ever fired from these six inch guns - the first Australian shots of both World War I and World War II were fired from Point Nepean.

Gun Barrel number 1489 fired the first shot of World War I to prevent the German steamer Pfalz leaving the bay on 5 August 1914.

Gun Barrel number 1317 fired the first Allied shot of World War II as a warning shot at a Bass Strait trader which had failed to identify itself.

It is my pleasure to announce that these historically significant guns will be given by the Commonwealth on permanent loan to Victoria.

These guns, which belong to the Department of Defence and have for years been located at the entrance to this property, will be relocated to a site very close to their original emplacements. The guns were restored by cadets at the former Officer Cadet School and will provide visitors with an authentic experience of the historic Fort Nepean.

Point Nepean Park also includes Cheviot Beach from which the former Prime Minister Harold Holt disappeared while swimming in 1967. As part of the restoration work, the memorial to Harold Holt will be relocated from the beach to Cheviot Hill.

Apart from its historical value, this area is also justly famous for its spectacular rugged landscape. This is an area of virtually undisturbed coastal vegetation. It is the habitat for some unique species of flora and fauna, and is the only known breeding site of the Dominican Gull. It looks now much as it must have looked to the Aboriginal inhabitants of this area when they first saw Lt. John Murray sail through the Heads in 1802 in the Lady Nelson.

My Government has always placed strong emphasis on joint conservation activities with State and Territory Governments. It is encouraging that Victoria gives such high priority to the protection and preservation of the natural environment so that it can be enjoyed by all Australians.

Local residents may be the principal beneficiaries of this new Park - they are already lucky because of the tremendous natural attractions of the Mornington Peninsula - but Point Nepean Park will without doubt attract visitors from the rest of the State and the rest of Australia.

For all these reasons, it is very appropriate that Point Nepean Park is one of the major projects in the Commonwealth-State Bicentennial Commemorative Program.

Under the Program the Commonwealth and the States are jointly funding lasting, accessible and practical legacies of the Bicentenary.

Victoria has undertaken a number of innovative projects which provide better access to the State's natural environment. Walking and cycling tracks have been established and upgraded along Melbourne's waterways, and tracks in the alpine region and along the routes of the explorers, Major Mitchell and Baldwin Spencer, have also been developed.

I congratulate the Victorian Government for developing such innovative projects under the Commonwealth-State Bicentennial Commemorative Program.

I am very happy to be here today to hand over to the Premier and the people of Victoria the Commonwealth land for the Point Nepean Park.
