



# PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY  
TAMWORTH - 26 JANUARY 1989

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Let me first of all extend my congratulations and thanks to the Tamworth City Council for organising this important ceremony today.

This Australia Day, citizenship ceremonies are being held in towns and cities throughout Australia. They are all part of the special effort we are making this year, the Year of Citizenship, to encourage people to take up the rights and obligations of full membership of the Australian community.

Tamworth has done a fine job, not just in administering the oaths and affirmations of citizenship but also in reminding us that those formal declarations of commitment to our nation are of deep significance for all of us.

Mr. Mayor,

I am told you have forgone the opportunity to visit the United States in order to be here today. May I pass on, through you, to your Council and to the people of Tamworth my thanks for their efforts today.

It's probably fairly typical of the laid-back Australian style that we usually spend Australia Day enjoying ourselves - like thousands of people do annually at the Country Music Festival here in Tamworth.

But Australia Day is also an occasion to celebrate our identity as Australians and our unity as a nation. It is a day for reflecting on what we are today and what we might become.

Australia Day last year, in our Bicentennial year, was particularly significant. But every Australia Day gives us an opportunity to celebrate our achievements as a nation - and we have a lot to celebrate.

In particular, Australia Day is a very fitting time for ceremonies such as this, at which we enlarge the family of Australian citizens.

So having thanked our Tamworth hosts, I now want to direct some particular comments to these twenty five people who are our guests of honour today - our twenty five new fellow citizens.

You men and women have just taken one of the most important decisions that anyone could take in their life. You have declared publicly your commitment to the country you have made your home.

You have come to Australia and to Tamworth from many different nations - Britain, France, Laos, New Zealand, Portugal and Singapore.

Now as Australians, you have taken on all the rights and obligations of Australian citizenship.

You have made a conscious declaration - one that those of us who were born here are not required to make.

So this occasion gives us all an opportunity to consider carefully what citizenship means.

Being Australian means many things.

It means sharing an identity as Australians in the midst of our tremendous diversity of origins and backgrounds.

It means having pride in the diversity of our multicultural society, and in the values of fairness, equity and understanding which have created it.

It means taking responsibility for the future prosperity and harmony of our country.

But above all else, being an Australian means having a commitment to Australia.

As I said on this day last year, during our Bicentennial celebrations on Sydney Harbour, the one thing needed to be an Australian is commitment to this country and to its future.

The way you look, the way you dress, the faith you observe, the place you were born - they are all important things but they are irrelevant to the question of whether you are a fair-dinkum Australian.

What is relevant is your commitment to our parliamentary institutions, to the rule of law, to freedom of speech, to our values of tolerance and a fair go for all - in short, your commitment to Australia.

Citizenship is the best expression of that commitment and Tamworth is a great place to celebrate it.

Tamworth is a living proof that Australia is, at heart, a nation of immigrants.

We perhaps tend to associate immigration with the inner suburbs of the great cities, but that's only because those areas tend to be home to the people who are the most recent arrivals in this country.

The truth, of course, is that over our two hundred year history every part of our nation has been influenced and enriched by the hard work and commitment of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants.

Before 1788, the Tamworth district was originally the home of the Kamillaroi Aboriginal people.

Then it was the Scots who laid the foundations of the great New England pastoral industries.

Then it was the Chinese and the Americans and others from around the world who came to the gold fields.

As the Mayor has already said, Tamworth today has a population made up of people from every part of the world - a microcosm of mankind.

Australia will continue to accept immigrants who contribute to our economic growth and prosperity through their skills and business investment.

And we will continue to do so using selection procedures that are utterly free of discrimination on grounds of race.

The days of the White Australia policy are dead and buried.

Australia also has a proud record in acknowledging our international humanitarian responsibilities by accepting for resettlement people who have been affected by war or tragedy in their country of birth.

The people of Tamworth have shared in this responsibility. Over the past 10 years the Tamworth Uniting Church and St Peter's Anglican Church have helped to resettle a large number of Laotian refugee families.

Today Tamworth has one of the largest Laotian communities outside Melbourne and Sydney, and I am delighted that some of the members of this community have become Australian citizens today.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today is a day of anniversaries.

We're probably all a bit blase about celebrating anniversaries, having just had the Bicentenary - which I know in Tamworth coincided with the one hundredth anniversary of Tamworth becoming the first town in Australia to use electric street lighting.

But we should still recall the significance of today.

It is of course the 201st anniversary of European settlement of this continent.

It is the fortieth anniversary of the introduction of the Chifley Government's Nationality and Citizenship Act - the law that created for the first time the legal concept of Australian citizenship.

The Bill had been introduced into Parliament the previous September, and it was on the 40th anniversary of that occasion last year that I announced 1988-89 would be a Year of Citizenship.

During this Year of Citizenship I want to draw attention to what it means to be an Australian citizen, and I want to encourage as many people as possible who are qualified to take up Australian citizenship, but have not yet done so, to make that public affirmation of their commitment to this country.

I have written recently to all Australian households about the importance of citizenship, and encouraging those who are not citizens to think carefully about taking this big step. The example set by these twenty five new citizens is a valuable element of the Year of Citizenship - an example I hope will be followed by many more people throughout the Year.

As the Year of Citizenship TV advertisements say, to become an Australian all you have to do is swear - that is to make a public declaration of your commitment.

I said today marks a number of anniversaries. Today also breaks something of a drought for Tamworth.

I am told that a search of your records has revealed the astonishing fact that before today, no Prime Minister had visited Tamworth for more than sixty-six years.

Billy Hughes made the last visit in 1922.

I don't know why all those Prime Ministers since then missed out on the warmth of your hospitality.

Billy Hughes was a remarkable man but I am sure he wasn't as warmly welcomed as I have been.

Then again, Billy Hughes didn't bring Slim Dusty to town.

Slim Dusty is going to play for us shortly - and I am sure that even in the tough competition of the 17th Country Music Festival he will as usual be a hit.

And may I say how delighted I am to have had the chance to hear Eric Bogle, Ted Egan, Norma Murphy, and John Williamson at this ceremony.

There's a very relevant lesson to be learned from country music in Australia.

Country music has its origins in other parts of the world.

But Australian country music artists have moulded and adapted it, imbued it with their own spirit and their own experience. They have given it a distinctively and genuinely Australian character.

In particular, country music is a place where black and white Australians have found common ground. Black artists as well as white have left their mark on the country music tradition and have been very popular entertainers.

So like so much that is great about this nation, country music has its roots elsewhere.

But who would say that the Tamworth Festival is not one of the great celebrations of Australian culture?

I would like to conclude by addressing myself once more to the people who have become citizens.

You join more than two million others who have made this declaration during the past 40 years since the introduction of that Chifley Government Act.

Many different paths have brought you here.

You represent many different backgrounds and many different histories. But you all have in common the wish to declare yourselves proudly as Australians.

As Prime Minister of Australia I am proud to welcome you as Australians and as fellow citizens.

From now on, we can work together as fellow Australians to ensure this nation's future prosperity, peace and freedom.

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