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PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF STATEMENT ON THE ENVIRONMENT
WENTWORTH, NSW
20 JULY 1989**

This morning's journey through three States, culminating in this launch at Wentworth, symbolises two realities about our environment. It shows in a graphic way that the degradation of our environment is not simply a local problem, nor a problem for one State or another, nor for the Commonwealth alone. Rather, the damage being done to our environment is a problem for all of us - and not just governments - but all of us individually and together.

The second reality is that the solutions - just as we have witnessed with the land rehabilitation programs in this region - are to be found through co-operation at all levels of government and by community groups who care for the land, who want to repair our damaged environment.

That is why I am delighted with the broad cross-section of institutions and groups represented here today - Federal Ministers, State Premiers and Ministers, local Members of Parliament, local government representatives, the remarkable alliance between the National Farmers' Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, the churches, community groups - but most importantly in a sense, the schoolchildren, our future.

It is to the future, to our children, that the statement I am launching today is dedicated. Through the measures announced in the statement and through the co-operation of all Australians, we seek an ecologically sustainable future. That simply means we have borrowed from our children part of their natural heritage and the time has come to repay the debt.

Environmental problems today, more than ever, are global. In just over 200 years since the Industrial Revolution, human activity has significantly increased the earth's temperature, threatening the onset of the greenhouse effect. Huge areas of the world's tree cover have been destroyed and we are obliterating thousands of living species. We have polluted the world's oceans, seas and rivers, degraded the earth's soils, damaged the fragile Arctic and Antarctic environments.

We have even managed to punch a hole through the ozone layer. It would have taken all our scientific ingenuity to do that deliberately, but it has taken no effort at all to pull off that spectacular accident.

Australia is one of the most fortunate countries, escaping some of the world's greatest environmental traumas - acid rain, persistent eye-watering smog, the disasters at Chernobyl and Bhopal, the blight caused by population pressures.

We have many magnificent environmental treasures - the Great Barrier Reef, the Queensland rainforests, the Tasmanian forests, Kakadu National Park.

And we have many proven successes in protecting the environment.

The Franklin runs free. Our World Heritage sites are a source of national pride. Greenhouse research is being funded. We are, with industry, phasing out ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons.

But we have our environmental problems, and many of them are serious. With today's statement the Federal Government is providing new impetus and new directions in tackling those problems.

And we're asking the community to join us in these efforts, for it is only by working together that we will restore and improve our environment.

I'm not going to outline all the initiatives we're launching today. They are explained in detail in the statement. But I will concentrate briefly on some of the key ones.

None of Australia's environmental problems is more serious than the soil degradation in this region and over nearly two-thirds of our continent's arable land.

Accordingly, we are declaring next year the Year of Landcare - it will be the first year in a Decade of Landcare that will provide as never before a focus for protecting the most fundamental ingredient both of our natural environment and of our agricultural prosperity - our soil.

Today I am committing \$320 million to a package of measures to apply over the Year and the Decade of Landcare.

And I express here my gratitude to Rick Farley of the NFF and Phillip Toyne of the ACF. They're two organisations one would probably not immediately imagine forming an alliance - but it is an indication of the importance of this issue, and an inspiring demonstration of the way forward that they used their imagination and commitment to develop proposals and put them constructively to Government. Their work has been an invaluable contribution to the creation of this new program.

To address the special problems in this region, the Commonwealth will provide up to \$18 million over the next two years to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission so that it can begin to implement the Natural Resources Management Strategy for the Basin. My colleague, Senator Cook, will have more to say about this in a moment.

A key ingredient in the treatment of many soil degradation problems is the growing of trees.

Trees will help slow the greenhouse effect; they provide habitat for endangered species; they form magnificent wilderness areas and complete forest ecosystems; they ease the burden on our virgin native forests as a source of commercial timber.

We need more trees.

I am pleased to say, therefore, that after this launch Hazel - who is patron of Greening Australia - will plant the first of One Billion Trees to be planted over the coming decade. This is an ambitious program aimed at re-greening at least parts of Australia, at restoring some of the 50 per cent of tree cover removed in 200 years of European settlement in this ancient continent.

One Billion Trees is very much a community program - and I'd like you and schoolchildren throughout Australia, through your teachers, to plant trees and most importantly, to look after them to make sure they grow.

We must, too, save those important remnants of native vegetation on our farming lands. To this end I am announcing a Save the Bush remnant vegetation program. This has been inspired by the pioneering work of South Australia and I pay tribute to John Bannon for showing a lead which my Government, and I hope, the other State Governments, will pick up.

Of course, Australia needs a healthy, viable forest industry. That viability must increasingly be based on plantation development, to ease the burden on our virgin native forests. The Government's National Afforestation Program will be applied to this task - and our forest strategy will be informed by the work of the newly established Resource Assessment Commission.

Meanwhile, Commonwealth Ministers will be arranging trials on the use of recycled and unbleached paper in their Departments. The Government is removing the 20 per cent sales tax on a range of recycled paper products.

The roll call of Australian animals and plants that have been wiped out in the last two hundred years is long - at least 18 species of mammals and 100 species of flowering plants. Another 40 species of mammals are in danger of

extinction and 3,300 plants species are rare or endangered. We must strive to save them - and so the Government has decided to allocate \$2m for each of the first two years of a 10 year Endangered Species Program.

Although we're out in the bush today, the nation's environmental concerns do not end at the urban fringe. Pollution in our cities, preservation of our urban cultural heritage, the environmental strains caused by often haphazard coastal development - all of these are the subject of new Federal Government measures detailed in the Statement.

The Commonwealth also wants to advance with the States the development of agreed national minimum environmental standards, addressing matters affecting air, water and noise quality.

I've said the environment is a global problem, and I can assure you Australia's concern for the environment doesn't end at our shores.

We will be taking the lead in developing international conventions on greenhouse gas emissions and on biological diversity.

Australia will do everything in its power to ensure Antarctica remains free from mining.

We will be seeking a global ban on the barbarous practice of driftnet fishing which indiscriminately kills dolphins, seals and small whales.

And we will be urging faster international action on the phasing out of CFCs.

Consistent with these international efforts, Australia will be developing a national strategy on greenhouse emissions and we are accelerating the phase-out of CFCs - nearly all CFC use will be phased out within five years. I have put greenhouse issues on the agenda for the first meeting of my Science Council.

To give Australia a stronger and a clearer voice on global environmental issues such as Antarctica, and the greenhouse and ozone problems - and to have a strong, consistent capacity to be represented in the increasing rounds of international negotiations and range of forums that will characterise our involvement in these issues - the Government has decided to appoint a special Ambassador for the Environment. I am delighted to tell you that Sir Ninian Stephen has agreed to be Australia's first Ambassador for the Environment. I am sure everyone will agree that no-one could better discharge this important role for Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When the earth is spoiled, humanity and all living things are diminished. We have taken too much from the earth and given back too little. It's time to say enough is enough.

Today's announcements won't solve everything. But with the right mix of political commitment and community support we can ensure that our country is simply the best in the world.

This is our country, our future. I give my commitment to you, kids, that my generation will hand on to you a better country, a brighter future.
