



PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF THE COMMONWEALTH/STATE
TASK FORCE ON TASMANIA
HOBART - 19 NOVEMBER 1989

I am delighted to be here in Tasmania this morning on a very special occasion that marks a new era of co-operation and goodwill between my Government and the Government of Tasmania.

When Premier Michael Field announced earlier this year that he intended to hold an Employment Summit on 28 and 29 November in Parliament House, Hobart, I was determined that the Commonwealth Government would take an active and constructive part.

Because the Summit represents a new approach to put Tasmania back on the path towards co-operation and prosperity.

I want to outline today how we will be working with Michael Field's Government, both to make the Summit a success, and in the longer-term to ensure Tasmania's particular problems receive the attention they deserve.

Let me say at the outset that the initiative of Michael Field, and of my Parliamentary colleague Duncan Kerr, is a very welcome one.

- it's a serious endeavour to foster employment and enterprise development in Tasmania.

For too long, under the previous State Government, Tasmania's economic plight was ignored or concealed behind the bluster of a Premier and a conservative party which had no idea of how to go about remedying the problem.

The fact is, Tasmania's unemployment is high relative to the rest of Australia and employment growth is well below the national average.

That appalling situation - appalling for the well-being of the State as a whole and debilitating for those directly hit by unemployment - never received any constructive attention from the previous Government.

Indeed, their confrontationalist approach exacerbated the situation.

What is essential now is that we develop a strategy which will create a base for sustainable economic growth, thereby generating permanent employment opportunities for Tasmanians.

In doing this, let us not ignore the number of real advantages that Tasmania brings to the question of building the basis for long-term growth. For example, labour costs in Tasmania are lower than on the mainland, and this reflecting not a difference in the structure of industry in the State but a real difference in the cost structure of comparable industries.

In recent years Tasmania has also had an especially good industrial relations record, with the working days lost per employee in the last two years being less than half the national average - which itself is nearly 60 per cent lower than under the previous Federal conservative government.

This is a credit to employers and to the trade union movement in Tasmania whose co-operation under the principles of the Accord has provided an outstanding industrial climate in the State.

Another major asset that Tasmania enjoys is the substantial assistance rendered by the Commonwealth to relieve the employment problems in the State.

First, under the policy of fiscal equalisation, Tasmania receives a per capita level of Commonwealth assistance which is more than 40 per cent higher than the average for Australia as a whole. This permits Tasmania to fund higher levels of outlays and public sector employment than would otherwise be the case.

Second, Tasmania enjoys a number of forms of assistance not available in other States: the \$50 million forestry industry package, the \$45 million paid under the Gordon-Below-Franklin Package; the Tasmanian freight equalisation package of more than \$30 million this year and the Tasmanian Wheat Freight Subsidy Scheme, worth some \$3.6 million this year.

Third, the Commonwealth provides a full range of programs designed to assist employment, education and training in Tasmania. This year the total cost of these programs was

\$25 million including substantial commitments to TAPE, to trade training, the Australian Traineeship system and the programs Jobstart, Jobtrain and SkillShare.

To ensure that these forms of assistance available from the Commonwealth can be directed and focused to maximum effect, and to sharpen the effectiveness of the Summit, I have decided, in consultation with Premier Field to establish a special Commonwealth-State Task Force on Tasmania.

The Task Force will report to me on action which the Commonwealth can take to assist the economic and social development of Tasmania.

The Task Force members all have a close understanding of Tasmanian needs. It will be chaired by the Federal Member for Denison, Duncan Kerr, who developed the concept of the Task Force with me. The members of the Task Force will be:

- . Peter Duncan, Commonwealth Minister for Employment and Education Services;
- . Michael Tate, Commonwealth Minister for Justice;
- . Peter Patmore, Deputy Premier of Tasmania;
- . Michael Aird, Tasmanian Minister for the Environment and Planning, Minister for Employment, Industrial Relations and Training, Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth Affairs;
- . Mr Kerry O'Brien, President, Trades and Labour Council and Secretary, Miscellaneous Workers Union;
- . Mr Paul Salmon, Managing Director, Electrolytic Zinc Company of Australia Ltd; and
- . Ms Robyn Cooney, Consultant to the Tasmanian Development Authority, Community Representative.

I want this Task Force to perform three key roles:

- . First to examine ways of better integrating Commonwealth and Tasmanian State programs which have a bearing on employment generation and economic and social development;
- . Second to develop Commonwealth-State proposals which would further the economic and social development of Tasmania, while recognising the fiscal constraints within which both governments must operate;
- . Third, to advise me on appropriate Commonwealth responses to the Tasmanian Employment Summit.

First, the Antarctic environment is extremely fragile and critically important to the whole global ecosystem.

Second, mining in Antarctica will always be dangerous, and could be catastrophically so.

In the light of those propositions, we are convinced that the Minerals Convention is basically flawed.

It is based on the clearly incorrect assumption - current in the 1970s - that mining in the Antarctic could be consistent with the preservation of the continent's fragile environment.

But any mining operation, with its accompanying infrastructure and bulk transport needs, would have a lasting and major impact on the area in which it takes place.

I do not believe that the risk of accidents can ever be totally eliminated - either by paper regimes or by advances in technology.

The recent oil spills at the United States' Scott-Amundsen and McMurdo Stations, although minor, demonstrate that it is hard enough to prevent mishaps with existing, much lower level, non-resource-based activity.

The Minerals Convention might provide for some a dangerous illusion of environment protection.

But by permitting immediate prospecting and setting out a path by which mining might proceed it will in fact be working in precisely the opposite direction.

So with France, Australia is pursuing the initiative of a comprehensive environmental protection convention which will establish Antarctica as a "Natural Reserve - Land of Science."

I am aware that our decision has caused considerable anxiety amongst those Antarctic Treaty members who believed that the coming into force of the Minerals Convention was not just a correct outcome but a foregone conclusion.

And I'm also aware of assertions that our opposition to the convention is purely tactical, or has been adopted for short-term electoral reasons and will be reversed as soon as convenient.

Let me urge anyone who might still harbour that fantasy to abandon it.

Because the reverse is true.

I am convinced that more and more countries will come to share the position that President Mitterrand, Prime Minister Rocard and I have outlined. Already we are receiving strong support from countries such as Belgium, Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, and India.

In the end, that position will prevail - because it is correct, and because it is being endorsed by international public opinion which, in the coming months and years, will only gather further momentum and strength.

The current discussions taking place about the Minerals Convention, and the guidelines, codes of conduct and other measures that Treaty parties have already put into place - including the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources - attest to the environmental sensitivity that has characterised the management of Antarctica under the Treaty system.

Australia and France are not challenging the Treaty system, or the operation of the consensus principle that has underpinned its operation.

But we are challenging Treaty members to accept that times have changed since the 1970s, that our levels of knowledge have changed, and that we need to continue to justify the Antarctic Treaty Parties' management regime in Antarctica.

In taking the initiative on this issue, we are seeking to achieve a goal that we believe would yield important benefits - mutual benefits for all the people of the world.

Australia, as a middle power, puts great store in multilateral forums, because they are the best vehicles for tackling global problems that are too broad and complex for individual nations to resolve alone.

So, we are leading the efforts to liberalise world trade in the Uruguay Round; initiating moves to establish closer economic co-operation in our Asia Pacific region; hosting the recent Government and industry conference against chemical weapons; actively exerting international pressure on the abhorrent system of apartheid.

- diverse issues, but all requiring serious and concerted efforts by many nations if the global community is to reap the benefits they promise.

It is with that attitude and that aspiration that we approach these vital decisions that must be made about the future of Antarctica.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The intrepid voyages and scientific activities of Jacques Cousteau, from whom we will hear shortly, have inspired our generation, just as those of Dumont D'Urville, Amundsen and Mawson captured the imagination of our forebears.

If we don't measure up in our decisions to protect the Antarctic environment, we can be certain that people like Jacques Cousteau will be there to tell us so.

I am firmly convinced that one of the greatest legacies our generation can leave to the future may yet be one of the simplest: one continent unspoilt, a testament to our own recognition that in other corners of the world we have already gone too far.
