



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF
AUSTRALIAN CONSERVATION FOUNDATION'S
NEW HEADQUARTERS
MELBOURNE - 11 DECEMBER 1989

There is a healthy, vigorous debate in this country about our economy. Attention is rightly focussed on Australia's international debt. The country is said to be living beyond its means - yet much of Australia's external deficit is financing the means to lift our productive capacity in the future; to earn export income and to replace imports.

That we have so much investment coming through is viewed as bad news by some participants in the debate. True, if there were less investment, Australia's external deficit would be smaller, but so would our prospects for improved living standards in the future.

I am not saying Australia's international indebtedness is not a problem, but it has to be kept in perspective. Just like going into debt to set up a business can be worthwhile, much of Australia's debt is good debt.

Some of you may be thinking I've brought along the wrong speech and that this one was meant for a business seminar. I can assure you that what I have to say today is totally appropriate for the opening of the ACF's new headquarters - and I'm delighted to have been asked to be here.

My friends, Australia's international indebtedness has everything to do with the ACF and the interests you represent. You, like all Australians, want to see improved living standards in the future, a better quality of life.

And we must have investment to achieve that. But what sort of investment?

Today I want to talk about a broader concept of investment.

Investment has conventionally been thought of solely in terms of the opening of mines and oilfields, the setting up of factories and offices. But the central point I want to make today is that a very good investment, especially for Australia, can be to leave some places and things alone, to protect them rather than spoil them. Other good investments will involve developing our natural resources, but in a careful, environmentally sensitive way, and not exploiting them indiscriminately for short-term gain at the expense of long-term damage.

Around the world there have been countless investments that were expected to - and did - produce a large financial return. The factories that polluted the atmosphere and the rivers, causing Europe's acid rain and killing Canadian and American waterways - most of these no doubt were regarded as good investments by the relevant decision makers at the time. The Exxon Valdez was carrying a valuable cargo when it ran aground in Alaska.

All good investments at the time. The trouble is, somebody forgot to count all the risks and all the costs. Who counted the environmental risks, the environmental costs?

I'm not saying that none of these investments should have occurred. What I am saying is that many of them wouldn't have, or would have proceeded in a more environmentally friendly manner, if governments had been aware of all the costs and risks - and had insisted on those costs being taken into account and stronger measures being taken to reduce the environmental risks.

The consequence of these decisions is that present and future generations have to pay the costs that weren't properly taken into account in the first place.

A great environmental debt has been accumulated by past and present generations and bequeathed to our children, and theirs, to pay.

That debt is called acid rain. It is called the greenhouse effect. It is called thousands of extinct species. It is called salinity, soil degradation, beach pollution. It is called Bhopal, Chernobyl.

Just a few years ago the level of broad community awareness of and concern about this burgeoning environmental debt was not high. Before the breakthroughs on arms control between the United States and the Soviet Union, many people thought there wouldn't be a world around too much longer for them to worry about. The threat of nuclear obliteration dominated most thinking about the earth's future.

But over the past few years, with nuclear tensions easing and with greater information coming to light about the global threats posed by greenhouse gases and CFCs, concern for the environment has spread from the preserve of a relatively few, seeking to protect a local river, beach or forest, to occupy the minds of people all around the world who would never have considered themselves to be greenies. It is this internationalisation of environmental problems that has stirred environmental concern around the globe and made people aware not only of these global problems but of how their local environment is being managed, or mismanaged.

I know from personal experience that when I visited schools around Australia three years ago the kids spoke of the threat of nuclear war. Now they ask about trees, ozone and Kakadu.

It is to their future, our children's future, that we in Government must look - and assess the relevance of our economic and environmental policies.

My Government welcomes and has encouraged investment. Some \$90 billion worth of investment in the pipeline has recently been documented by Access Economics, a measure of our success, a proud achievement. And we will continue to encourage investment including in mining and forestry. But we are not a Government that supports investment at any price.

Yet there are, in our community, strong advocates of just that - investment at any price. They argued for the Franklin Dam. They argued for the Wesley Vale Pulp Mill to proceed, pumping 13 tonnes of organochlorines into Bass Strait every day. They argue for mineral surveying in Kakadu National Park. They argue for logging the Queensland rainforests. They argue for sand mining at Shelburne Bay.

They condemned my Government for World Heritage Listing the Lemonthyme and Southern Forests of Tasmania. They called my Environment Statement - which announced a \$320m landcare program, an endangered species program, a massive tree planting program and a dozen other important initiatives - a political stunt.

I refer, of course, to the Liberal and National Parties of Australia. Their leadership at one time or another has pledged to reverse just about every major decision my Government has made on the environment. They would not use the external affairs power - which gave us the capacity to stop the Franklin Dam, protect the Tasmanian and Queensland forests, and Kakadu - and they will not support a referendum on increased constitutional powers for the Commonwealth Government.

Their profound misunderstanding of the whole issue was vividly revealed in Parliament last month by Charles Blunt, the Leader of the National Party. He was giving the Government stick over Kakadu when he made the outstanding claim that Coronation Hill included palladium and platinum, but no gold. One of our members interjected to suggest gold was present but Blunt said "No gold, the Honourable Member is totally ignorant. He knows nothing about the issue at all".

It's disturbing to have confirmed one's deepest suspicions that the Opposition's environmental views are based on ignorance and prejudice rather than on an informed, open-minded assessment of the issues.

The Coalition and their backers have learned nothing about the environment. They have pledged economy before ecology.

My Government's philosophy is one of ecologically sustainable development. It's not a matter of one or the other - economy or ecology. They go hand in hand. That is why the Labor Government in Australia has created jobs at a rate twice as fast as the rest of the Western world, at the same time as advancing - as the World Heritage Bureau has said - World Heritage values more than any other country. In others words, Australia, under my Government, is a world pace setter both in encouraging development and protecting the environment. We in Government have proved that we can have both; we must have both.

We will continue to assess the environmental risks of development projects. And we will encourage such projects where those risks are acceptable. But I will not compromise the quality of life of our children by playing Russian roulette with the environment. As Prime Minister I have a responsibility not only for present generations but for their children, and theirs.

I am not prepared to take the easy course and convert Australia's economic debt into an environmental debt to be borne by our children.

The sort of Australia I want to see in 20 or 30 years time is a country which is the envy of the rest of the world. In large measure it already is. But as the countries of Europe, America and our own region continue to have great difficulty in reversing the damage already done to their environments, I want their people to look to Australia and say "Look at the beautiful places down there, look at their wonderful coastline, their forests, their great National Parks. How did they manage to keep them unspoiled when we wrecked ours?" And I want those people to visit Australia, to see our great natural places, and tell others back home what a magnificent place Australia is.

Now that's an investment in Australia's future. Australia will, I believe, become one of the prime tourist destinations in the world. Did you know that in the seven years since this Government came to power, annual tourist arrivals have risen from less than a million to 2¼ million? And did you know that the Australian Tourist Commission is projecting an increase in overseas tourist arrivals from about 2 million in 1989 to 6.5 million by the year 2000, and an increase in tourist expenditure from \$3.7 billion to \$27.7 billion over the same period?

Australia now has eight World Heritage sites. This month, we expect a further 600,000 ha of Tasmania's wilderness and scenic places will be accepted for World Heritage Listing.

And I can announce here today Australia will be hosting next year's General Assembly of the World Heritage body, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. This is a great honour for Australia and we are delighted to be able to host this very important meeting.

Our common concern for the environment does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and adopt a no-growth strategy, other than tourist development. There is a place for environmentally-responsible development of Australia's natural resources; there is a real and legitimate place for those developments.

Many areas do lend themselves to multiple land use - but this must not, and will not under my Government, be a euphemism for pot-holing National Parks with mine pits or cutting down magnificent, pristine, native forests to have them replaced with re-growth forests that provide neither the habitat nor the integrity of virgin forests.

I believe there is cause for optimism about the capacity of developmental interests to be reconciled with environmental interests in this country. Certainly the remarkable alliance between the ACF and the NFF, whose proposals to the Government on soil degradation were taken on board in my Environment Statement, demonstrates that traditional adversaries can become allies when economic and environmental imperatives coincide.

So, too, is the Salamanca Agreement in Tasmania testimony to the capacity of traditional rivals in the forestry debate to become partners in both protection of the environment and the maintenance of jobs.

The Salamanca Agreement is a model for forest agreements in the rest of Australia. More immediately, it is a model for the South-East Forests of New South Wales. My colleague, Peter Cook, has worked tirelessly in seeking a sensible resolution of this issue.

My Government is concerned to protect the National Estate forests of South-East New South Wales - but of course we also have a responsibility to maintain employment.

We are undertaking the most comprehensive study ever of the biological values of the National Estate as the basis of a long term conservation and industry plan in the region. We also have under way a number of important industry studies - on the establishment of a flitchmill, on value-adding in the sawmilling industry and on better utilisation of smallwood, and on how best to get plantations under way in the region as soon as possible.

Through these efficiency improvements and the identification of alternative forest areas outside the National Estate, I hope we can get to a position where the industry will not have to return to logging the existing National Estate forest areas in the South-East.

Our chances of realising that hope are maximised if we can all work together on the problem. I am pleased that the South East Forest Alliance has agreed to be on the regional consultative committee that Peter Cook is establishing. We hope its inaugural meeting will be before Christmas.

We want a co-operative resolution of this issue; that is always our preferred way. But I say again that should the New South Wales Government not abide by the agreement reached with them or not co-operate in a full examination of alternatives to logging the South East National Estate forests, my Government will bring down the full weight of its constitutional powers - including the corporations power - to achieve a solution.

If we can have alliances between the ACF and the NFF on soil conservation and if we can have Salamanca style agreements, there must be scope for greater understanding and agreement on the future management of all our natural resources.

That is why I convened a meeting last Thursday on ecologically sustainable development involving Phillip, representing the ACF, and representatives of the forest, agricultural and mining industries, and the Wilderness Society, together with my four Ministers most directly concerned with these issues, my Chief Scientist and Australia's Ambassador for the Environment.

As a result of that meeting the Government will be circulating a paper on sustainable development, for comment. Then we will all consider the establishment of working groups to give practical application to the concept of sustainable development in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, energy, manufacturing and tourism.

Last Thursday's meeting was a first step, but an important one. Just to have representatives of such a diverse group of organisations - traditionally the antagonists in the environmental debate - is a good achievement. It is one on which I am confident we can all build.

Ecologically sustainable development will involve the environmentally sensitive development of our natural resources. But it must also involve the reservation of particular areas where no commercial development is allowed. That has and will continue to be my Government's approach.

And one great exclusion area that my Government has been working to secure is the entire continent of Antarctica.

When my Government set out on the road in May this year to seek an international ban on mining in Antarctica we were given no chance of succeeding. Yet at the Paris meeting of Antarctic Treaty Parties in October, Australia and France achieved agreement to a special meeting to consider proposals for a Comprehensive Environment Protection Convention for Antarctica, establishing Antarctica as an International Nature Reserve.

My Government has been criticised for taking our campaign to the people. I make no apology for appealing to public opinion - for ultimately it will be the weight of international public opinion, not bureaucrats or politicians, which will decide this issue.

We may not succeed within a year, but succeed ultimately we will - with your help. As we in Government continue to press our case with other Governments, you must continue to mobilise international public opinion against mining in Antarctica.

Apart from its value as the world's last great wilderness, Antarctica is a vitally important laboratory for measuring both the depletion of the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect.

My Government has acted decisively to phase out the use of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons. At the end of this month, the production and importation of aerosols and polystyrene foams containing CFCs will be banned. And within five years, we will have phased out nearly all CFC use.

Just as we are acting on CFCs, so too are we working on limiting greenhouse gas emissions. We have devoted \$7.8 million to greenhouse research; we are supporting the work of the International Panel on Climate Change; and we are taking an active role in the development of a Framework Convention on Climate Change.

I believe there is enormous scope for energy conservation in Australia, and there is ample capacity for limiting emissions of greenhouse gases.

Late last month some of my Ministers had the opportunity of talking to Amory Lovins, a leading energy expert from the United States.

I will be inviting Dr Lovins to return to Australia in early 1990 so that he can meet with both environment and energy ministers from the Commonwealth, States and Territories, to discuss his strategies for abating global warming, with particular reference to our situation in Australia.

I said in my Environment Statement that we will commission scientific investigations into the extent of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that can be achieved; and that I will be inviting industry and conservation representatives to consider this work and make submissions in preparation for a meeting on this issue.

Some important early work was discussed at the first meeting of my Science Council and I have just sent out a discussion paper to the ACF, other conservation groups and industry groups on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Australia. Commonwealth Departments have already been asked to commence discussions with State and local governments with a view to implementing options available immediately for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

I turn now to a matter that has been causing consternation among many of your members and the wider community - the future of Jervis Bay. Already the EIS processes have thrown up a number of serious environmental impacts that would be associated with a move of the Sydney based naval fleet to Jervis Bay. Moreover, the costs of moving the Sydney fleet base to Jervis Bay would be very high indeed. We will be putting alternative sites to environmental and economic analysis. But I can inform you that the Government is no longer disposed to move the Sydney naval fleet to Jervis Bay.

Ladies and gentlemen

Yours is a non-partisan organisation, its members united by issues rather than party political affiliation. That is exactly as it should be. Moreover you are, in my judgement, right to believe that the ACF needs to go on encouraging a wide ranging public concern about the environment so that any political party attuned to the views of the electorate will give weight to the environment in its policies. That is a sensible recognition by you of political reality.

But another political reality is that in this country there are only two organisations which can form the Government, Labor and the Coalition - and that on any objective reading of the evidence it is Labor, not the Coalition, which is committed to the preservation of our splendid natural environment. So you must not expect me, as a political leader, to be non-partisan; my role is to assert to you clearly that Labor is the right choice and is demonstrably the right choice.

Finally, I want to say a couple of words about the relationship between the ACF and the Government - something which attracted considerable media interest following one long phone call in the lead-up to the Kakadu decision. In my view, the ACF is a constructive, sophisticated organisation. We do not agree on every issue. But the manner in which you make practical representations to my Government, and your willingness to give credit where credit is due, gives you both relevance and effectiveness.

This close working relationship between the ACF and my Government has led to criticism by some environmentalists that the ACF is too close to the Government. Well if the charter of an environmental organisation is to protect and improve the environment, and through working with the Government the organisation advances that cause - as the ACF has done - then a true environmentalist can have no cause for grievance but instead must applaud your actions.

I pay tribute to the ACF and its leaders, Phillip Toyne and Peter Garrett, I encourage you to continue your all-important work in the professional and responsible manner in which you have conducted yourselves and I have pleasure in declaring open the new ACF headquarters.
