



**PROGRESS REPORT ON
THE ENVIRONMENT STATEMENT
'OUR COUNTRY, OUR FUTURE'**

It is now eight months since I delivered my Statement on the Environment, 'Our Country, Our Future'. I said in the concluding remarks to that Statement that further measures to preserve and enhance the environment would be taken by my Government. And I said earlier this year that I would be issuing a progress report on the Environment Statement. Today I am meeting those commitments.

While the purpose of this report is to inform you of the considerable progress that has already been made in implementing the undertakings given in 'Our Country, Our Future', I would not wish anyone to think that the task is nearly complete. I said in my original Statement that the measures announced in it would not put an end to the despoiling of the Earth, but that they would help. I can tell you now that they are helping, but there is a long road to travel before we as a community can claim to be good stewards of our natural heritage: before we can be sure that the world we pass on to our children one whose environment is protected and enriched.

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In our fourth term in office, we will continue to make the decisions needed to take our country further down the path of ecological sustainability.

The individual measures that my Government has taken are important, and I will report on those in some detail shortly. But it is the growing environmental awareness and commitment in the community which is enabling us to implement these new environmental measures. If the Environment Statement played any small part in raising that awareness then it will have been worthwhile. And if people are increasingly prepared to make their own small individual contributions to restoring and preserving the environment - and I believe they are - then we can all look with greater optimism to bequeathing to our children a better environment than that which we inherited.

Some of the most serious environmental problems are global in nature and require global solutions.

There is, of course, a limit to how much a nation of Australia's size can do in a global sense. But we are participating to the fullest extent of our capacity and I can say with pride that Australia is having an impact on global environmental issues far beyond Australia's size in the international community.

Australia is leading the world in an international campaign to ban mining in Antarctica. And we have taken the lead in imposing a global ban on the barbaric practice of driftnet fishing. Australia is prominent in international efforts to address the greenhouse effect. We are setting the pace in phasing out the use of ozone-depleting CFCs. And we are taking on a special responsibility in international efforts to preserve the Earth's biological diversity.

An obvious impediment to good environmental management in the past has been that we simply have not had available to us enough information to be able to make rational and informed decisions. This deficiency is now being addressed. My Government is funding a number of data bases and research efforts, which will provide the scientific underpinning for more informed decision making.

I would now like to report to you, in some detail, on the progress that has been achieved in the implementation of the commitments made in the Environment Statement last year.

LAND

The preservation of our soil and water resources remains an urgent task. We cannot continue to degrade our productive lands as we have done in the past. In many ways this is our most pressing national environmental problem.

The productive potential of Australian land has been reduced as a result of excessive clearance of native vegetation and overuse of soils. The result has been extensive erosion, salination, and water degradation.

The Government's main programs for dealing with these problems are the National Soil Conservation Program and Landcare. The Australian Conservation Foundation and the National Farmers' Federation have been working closely with the Government in the development of these programs. The success of both of these approaches to overcoming soil, land and water degradation depends heavily upon the co-operation of all resource users. Accordingly, the Environment Statement focussed on greater community awareness, participation and education concerning the importance of landcare and policies to improve it.

National Soil Conservation Program (NSCP)

The NSCP started in 1983 and is aimed at changing land management practices and attitudes towards the use of our soil. In the Environment Statement we provided an additional \$10 million to the NSCP for 1989-90. Over \$7 million of this has already been allocated to fund 492 new projects.

The NSCP has four major components. The establishment of Community Landcare Support Groups has been facilitated by the allocation of \$2.8 million. The aim of these groups is to encourage local community participation in projects which develop codes of practice for landuse, assess salinity damage, and trial techniques for improving farm planning. A clear indication of the success of this program is the interest shown in forming local groups. We have received a flood of applications, and these are now being processed.

The inadequacy of basic data on the severity and extent of degradation has been a constraint in overcoming it. In 1989-90, \$2.3 million has been provided to undertake an assessment of land degradation in Australia. It is expected that such an assessment for the whole of Australia will take until 1996 to complete.

Farmers need advice urgently on how to limit soil degradation. We have provided nearly \$1 million in 1989-90 for research into developing whole farming systems that are economic and yet do not degrade the soil. This research is being carried out by universities, CSIRO and State agencies.

It is important that difficulties in the transfer of such information and new technology do not constrain an effective soil conservation effort. A public awareness, education and training program is being supported by \$1 million in funding.

The additional funding provided in the Environment Statement means that total program expenditure over the next two years will be \$49 million for landcare and related tree planting and conservation programs.

Year and Decade of Landcare (1990 to the Year 2000)

The Year and Decade of Landcare is utilising participation and education programs to increase awareness among rural and urban communities of the problems caused by land degradation and the practices necessary to tackle it.

The Landcare Australia Foundation has received \$1 million to manage a national public awareness, participation and education campaign for the Year and Decade of Landcare and to administer corporate sponsorships.

A Landcare Liaison Group has been established comprising representatives from Government, science and the community to help co-ordinate and publicise land, soil and water policies. The Group is producing an information leaflet outlining the funds available under all the land related projects.

Murray Darling Basin

Unsustainable economic activity is a particular problem in the Murray Darling Basin. The economic importance of the Murray Darling Basin and the gravity of the environmental problems facing the area made the junction of these two great rivers an appropriate place for the launch of the Environment Statement last year. The problems are being addressed, but they will take time, and continuing commitment and co-operation from everyone involved - Commonwealth and State Governments, industry, farmers and environmentalists.

A Natural Resources Management Strategy has been developed to redress the degradation of land resources, impairment of water quality, rising water tables and the loss of native flora and fauna in the Murray Darling Basin. The Environment Statement provided an additional \$3 million in 1989-90 to implement this Strategy. In total, \$7.7 million was allocated in October 1989 to 96 new projects under the Strategy.

TREES

The last two hundred years have seen a substantial reduction in tree cover in Australia, but this is now being reversed. More and more people from all walks of life are coming to realise the importance of trees. Trees are not just a resource for a variety of industries. They are essential to maintaining the balance of our environment. They provide, in addition to timber, protection from erosion for our soils, protection of our water supplies, habitat for our native plants and animals, shelter for livestock and enjoyment for the community. And, because growing trees absorb carbon dioxide, they can help mitigate the greenhouse effect.

There are two ways of addressing tree loss - planting new trees and protecting existing ones. While tree planting plays a very important role, the preservation of native trees and vegetation is also important because of their special qualities, their resistance to drought and flood and the habitat that they provide for native plants and animals.

The Statement on the Environment announced two new programs to help protect and improve Australia's native tree and vegetation cover.

One Billion Trees

Under this program the Government aims to promote in the community an awareness of the importance of trees and to have one billion more trees growing around Australia by the year 2000. This can only be achieved, and will only have lasting value, if the community is actively involved.

As explained in the Environment Statement, some 400 million of these trees are to be planted in the community by school children, community groups and landholders. A further 600 million trees will be planted in open areas under the Natural Regeneration and Seeding Program. This will involve demonstrations in open areas of ways to improve methods of growing trees.

Greening Australia is administering the One Billion Trees program and has been allocated \$4.0 million for 1989-90. The community tree planting program was launched on 8 February 1990 at Redbank Plains in Queensland by Mrs Hawke as the patron of Greening Australia and by Senator Richardson. State Greening Australia bodies are finalising their programs and undertaking preparatory work to enable planting to commence on a large scale in this planting season - autumn in Eastern Australia.

While the One Billion Trees Program is a central element of the Government's approach, tree cover will also be enhanced as the result of a range of other programs which have as their objective the protection of our forests, soils, water and endangered species.

Save the Bush

Significant areas of native vegetation exist outside of the national parks system and these areas (and the native animals which they contain) need protection.

As part of our commitment to maintaining biological diversity a program to 'save the bush' was announced in the Environment Statement. By the end of 1990-91, \$2.5 million will have been allocated to encourage efforts in this area. The first allocation of funding under the program was a special grant of \$500,000 to the South Australian Government to assist it in a number of projects concentrated on the mallee area in the River Murray Basin.

Under the general grants scheme a further \$350,000 is to be provided within the next month or so via 29 grants to State and Territory governments and non-government organisations to support native vegetation conservation schemes.

Forests and Forest Industries

There are very heavy competing claims on Australia's native forests, particularly our oldgrowth forests. My Government is committed to protecting substantial areas of our native forests, but we are also determined to develop a thriving, secure forest industry based on adding maximum value to the product.

At this stage the Government does not have all of the information required to make soundly based decisions on the resolution of these competing claims.

For this reason, the Government has initiated a number of processes designed to generate that information. These include:

- Preparation of a National Forests Inventory, a National Wilderness Inventory and biological resource data bases;

- . The sending of a forests reference to the Resource Assessment Commission, which is due to report by November 1991; and
- . Various studies for the South East Forests of New Wales and East Gippsland in Victoria.

The information from these processes will help guide the Government in implementing a national forest strategy.

A key element in that strategy will be the augmentation of the available resource through the rapid increase in the establishment of eucalypt plantations to supply expanding amounts of pulpwood. We will examine all measures to facilitate the establishment of this resource. We will require woodchip exporters to commit themselves to the establishment of plantations. And, in keeping with the Government's policy of wanting to add value to all our produce, we will ask all of the major woodchip export companies in Australia to present to us their plans for adding value to this product before the end of the decade.

The Government's environmental guidelines for new bleached eucalypt kraft pulp mills, foreshadowed in the Environment Statement, were released in December 1989. These guidelines are the most stringent in the world. A package of measures to support the guidelines was announced at the same time, and is centred on a \$15 million research program which will be jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the State Governments and the industry. The program will be aimed at maintaining the capacity to research and monitor the environmental impact of kraft mills, and on developing organochlorine-free bleaching methods for eucalypt pulp.

DATABASES

There is a growing awareness of the need for a sound and scientifically based approach to the use of natural resources in Australia. The size of Australia, and the uniqueness of its native flora and fauna, make the gathering of the scientific information required a challenging task. While a great deal of information has already been collected, there are still enormous gaps to be filled over time. Much of the necessary information is not readily available. What is required is an ongoing commitment to filling the gaps that exist, learning more about the interactions between different elements within natural systems, and the organisation of information to make it more accessible.

The Environment Statement contained several initiatives which will add to the information bases necessary for more informed decision making in regard to natural resource management. These systems are based on computerised geographic information system technologies and enable many different data types to be assessed and integrated.

The Environmental Resources Information Network (ERIN)

The Environment Statement provided \$1.8 million for the establishment of the Environmental Resources Information Network (ERIN) in 1989-90 and a further \$2.1 million in 1990-91.

ERIN will collect and make available information on the distribution of vegetation types, endangered species, and heritage sites. The systems specifications enabling the integration of such data are currently being developed and implementation will commence in the first half of this year.

The National Forests Inventory

The Environment Statement provided \$2.9 million to develop an inventory of Australia's forest resources over the next three years. The Inventory will cover a broad classification of vegetation types, fauna and aspects of land tenure. Once this information has been drawn together, it will be able to be integrated with other natural resource information via the National Resource Information Centre (NRIC).

Guidelines for co-operation between the States and Territories and the Commonwealth in developing the inventory have been agreed at the officials level. A system of forest vegetation classification has been reviewed and a discussion paper prepared.

The National Wilderness Inventory

The National Wilderness Inventory aims to provide an inventory of Australia's wilderness resources. Once this information has been collected, it will provide a useful management tool for predicting the effect development proposals may have on wilderness qualities.

The inventory was initiated by my Government in 1986 and has already been completed in Tasmania and Victoria. Funding provided in the Environment Statement was used to complete the Cape York and South Australian components. Over \$200,000 has been allocated for inventories for Northern New South Wales, Northern Western Australia and Southern New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory to be undertaken between 1989-90 and 1991-92. Work is to commence on the Northern New South Wales inventory in this year.

The National Resource Information Centre (NRIC)

NRIC has been set up by the Government to improve the information base on Australia's natural resources. It is designed to enable better access to information about natural resources, as well as quicker and more cost effective information retrieval; and to provide better service to requests for planning projects.

Additional funding provided in the Environment Statement has enabled the development of a new and expanded version of the national directory of data sources, which is to be released in June 1990. This computer-based directory will facilitate data exchange between national and State directories.

The directory will also draw on information from natural resource sources such as ERIN, the National Forest Inventory and the National Wilderness Inventory, as well as socio-economic information such as population statistics and development plans. Computer techniques can then be applied enabling users to produce a display of integrated resource information. Users will be able to call up maps on a screen which will help them determine the resource implications of alternative courses of action.

THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT

Since early 1989 Australia has placed a high priority on issues relating to climate change - the greenhouse effect - both internationally and domestically.

National Responses

Last year the Government decided to augment existing climate change research by providing an additional \$7.8 million over the years 1989-90 and 1990-91. Of this amount, \$5.4 million is going towards a core program of research which includes work on modelling by the Bureau of Meteorology, CSIRO and the Department of Defence. Out of these funds, \$0.15 million is also being provided in 1989-90 to the Australian Academy of Science to enable the development of a research program and the planning of Australia's contribution to the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program.

The National Greenhouse Advisory Committee held its third meeting on 20 February 1990. At the meeting, the Committee reviewed the progress of the core research program and finalised the Dedicated Greenhouse Research Grants Scheme foreshadowed in the Statement, including determination of the objectives and priority areas for research under the scheme. The Committee is also developing an information program to promote public dissemination of greenhouse information.

The Environment Statement gave a commitment to work towards the domestic reduction of major greenhouse gases, and for those that are energy related, to work towards increased energy efficiency to yield a lower level of gas emissions for a given level of production. A commitment was also given to consult with relevant conservation and industry groups with the objective of achieving a global reduction in total greenhouse gas emissions, involving processes such as energy efficient manufacturing and vigorous moves to energy conservation in Australia and abroad.

I have established a Special Working Group on reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions within Australia. At the end of 1989 its preliminary report was released for public comment, and circulated to industry, union and conservation groups, and the State and Territory Governments.

The Working Group's report pointed to the high probability associated with projected global changes and the large uncertainties with respect to changes at the regional level. It concluded that policy responses should be justified on the grounds of improved efficiency and cost effectiveness. Consistent with views expressed by the Prime Minister's Science Council, the working group considered that the Commonwealth should adopt a phased approach in developing its national strategy.

The first phase, of short term options, should include continued and total phasing out of chlorofluorocarbons by the year 2000; encouragement of increased energy efficiency and conservation and improved energy use management; support for reforestation and efforts to minimise deforestation; and support for increased natural gas and renewable energy use in the residential sector.

More detailed consideration is being given to these matters in various Commonwealth/State ministerial councils.

Further work will be done by the Special Working Group on both short term and medium to longer term options.

The Commonwealth Government has now set in train the first phase of a long term education campaign with grants to conservation groups, Greenhouse Action and the National Greenhouse Advisory Committee, and funding for DASETT and the Australian and New Zealand Environment Council.

The National Health and Medical Research Council has appointed consultants to identify adverse health effects of potential climate change, develop strategies to deal with them, evaluate research and training needs, and propose data collection methodology.

International Responses

Australia has intensified its international activities in support of research and policy development, taking a leading role at meetings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and in preparation of papers for the IPCC report that is to be finalised in mid-1990. This report will cover all major aspects of greenhouse matters: science and monitoring, possible impacts, and the range of adaptation measures, including policy responses.

Australia has also played a constructive role in other international fora concerned with the greenhouse effect, including the United Nations, the OECD, and the South Pacific Forum. To facilitate IPCC consideration of the coastal zone aspects of climate change, Australia hosted an IPCC working group meeting in Perth in February 1990.

Because the problems associated with the greenhouse effect will require genuinely global solutions, and need the co-operation of developing as well as developed countries, Australia has funded developing country participation at key international meetings, especially those under IPCC auspices.

Australia has also been working with other countries on developing a framework international convention on climate change, which it is hoped will be ready for signature at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. This convention will provide an umbrella for more specific agreements addressing particular aspects of concern, such as international collaboration in scientific monitoring and research, technology transfer, and possible institutional funding arrangements.

At the 1989 South Pacific Forum, Australia offered to establish a network of sea level monitoring stations in the South Pacific at a cost of \$6.25 million. The Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) has now oversighted the completion of a feasibility study for the proposal. The design phase for the project is expected to be completed by the end of March and the equipment purchased by the end of the financial year. In addition, a technical expert is expected to be appointed by June to operate as a climate change adviser to governments and government authorities in the region.

In December 1989, the Prime Minister wrote to the developing Commonwealth countries inviting them to take part in an Australian-funded technical assistance program. Under this program, scientists from participating countries will be trained in the use of techniques and models which will enable them to predict from climate data the distribution and productivity of crops, pastures, forests and animals.

OZONE

There is now widespread community awareness of the hole in the ozone layer, and the threat that it poses to Australians in particular, who already have a high incidence of skin cancers. Australia has taken a leading position in combatting this global problem, and we are making rapid progress domestically.

As foreshadowed in the Environment Statement, a National Strategy for Ozone Protection for Australia was announced in August 1989 by the Australian and New Zealand Environment Council. Guidelines and targets have been set which will result in a 95 per cent reduction in the manufacture and import of CFCs and halons by 1995 and a total phase out by 1998.

These guidelines and targets complement the Federal Ozone Protection Act which provides for a ban on the manufacture and importation of CFC based aerosols and polystyrene foam used in insulation. These bans came into effect on 31 December 1989. Bans on the sale of these items are to come into effect during 1990 under State legislation.

These actions fulfil the undertakings in the Environment statement. They also give Australia a rate of reduction in CFC use twice as fast as the rate required by the Montreal Protocol. As indicated in the Statement, we have also led the way in limiting exports of CFCs, and have offered assistance with alternative technologies to other countries.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As indicated in the Environment Statement, the general principle of sustainable development has had broad acceptance in Australia since the adoption of the National Conservation Strategy for Australia in 1983. It has underpinned Commonwealth policies since then and it was the underlying theme of the Environment Statement.

In order to give greater impetus to the application of the sustainable development concept within Australia, in December 1989 I invited the State and Territory Governments, and industry, union and conservation representatives to co-operate with the Commonwealth in developing a national strategy on sustainable development. This strategy will be based on a sectoral approach and have as its aim the development of a framework for moving major industry sectors towards long term sustainability.

As a first step, the Commonwealth is preparing a discussion paper on the concept of sustainable development, for circulation to interested groups and the States and Territories. When the paper has been finalised following that process, it will be issued as a starting point for the sectoral working groups that will be established to address major problems and issues in each of the main industry sectors - agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, energy, manufacturing and tourism. The working groups will be expected to report significant progress by the end of 1990.

RECYCLING

Much of the waste produced by modern industrial societies can be usefully recycled. Reusing material reduces the demand for our natural resources as well as reducing the overall waste disposal problem.

In an effort to promote recycling initiatives in the public sector, the Commonwealth has investigated the potential for the use of recycled paper in government offices and is presently reviewing paper contracts.

The Commonwealth has exempted a range of recycled paper products from wholesale sales tax to encourage their use. This exemption covers designated recycled paper products sold after 4 October 1989.

As part of the environmental education strategy, \$150,000 has been allocated for the establishment of a National Recycling Centre. The Centre will develop and sponsor a comprehensive education program for children on recycling. The grant will also assist in equipping a mobile van to enable the Recycling Centre's education program to be extended to rural schools.

EDUCATION

The Government recognises the importance of environmental research and is committed to promoting a high standard of research in the higher education system. In 1990 the Australian Research Council will provide \$5.2 million for 109 research grants, a special research centre at the University of Western Australia and three key teaching centres.

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training launched an environmental education Strategy in November 1989. The strategy provides \$400,000 to increase the awareness and understanding of our global environment in Australia's schools. Of this money \$150,000 is for the National Recycling Centre, \$100,000 for the development of environmental education programs in Victorian schools, \$70,000 was provided to the Gould League for an information booklet, \$40,000 for National Environment Awards and \$40,000 to contribute to a conference for teachers involved in environmental education.

CAPE YORK PENINSULA JOINT LAND USE STUDY

Cape York Peninsula is one of the least developed and most sparsely populated areas in Australia. Rich in biological species and with a considerable variety of ecosystems, as well as an important Aboriginal cultural heritage, the Peninsula's relative isolation has been a major constraint on development and the construction of infrastructure. It is, however, of increasing interest as a tourist destination and has some potential to develop its fisheries, pastoral and agricultural activities and forestry and mining.

Because of concern that any further development must take due account of both environmental and Aboriginal values, the Premier of Queensland, Mr Goss, and I agreed in December 1989 that our Governments would conduct a joint land use study of Cape York Peninsula. This study is expected to be a precursor to a long term strategy, including research and planning, that will integrate the goals of conservation and development.

THE RESOURCE ASSESSMENT COMMISSION (RAC)

The Resource Assessment Commission (RAC) was established on 1 July 1989, with the task of conducting independent inquiries into major complex resource issues. The inquiry into options for the use of Australia's forest and timber resources has begun. The first public hearing was held in December 1989. The Commission is to report by 30 November 1991.

The Government announced on 5 October 1989 that a reference would be sent to the RAC to inquire into the environmental values of the greatly reduced Kakadu Conservation Zone, together with the impact on these values and on the values of Kakadu National Park of possible mining operations there. Consistent with provisions of the Resource Assessment Commission Act, the State and Territory Governments and industry, union and conservation groups are being consulted on the terms of reference for the Inquiry. The Inquiry is to run for one year.

A third reference, on coastal zone management, has been foreshadowed, and terms of reference are expected to be finalised in mid 1990.

ANTARCTICA

Because of the uniqueness and fragility of the Antarctic environment, its protection as the world's last unspoilt continent has been a high priority for the Government. Australia has been working closely with France in seeking international support for the negotiation within the Antarctic Treaty System of a comprehensive environmental protection convention for Antarctica which would ban mining. In support of this initiative Australia has recently hosted a visit by Captain Jacques Cousteau, the distinguished marine explorer, environmentalist and inventor.

A special Antarctic Treaty consultative meeting on the antarctic environment will be held later in 1990 to consider the Australian-French proposal for such a convention which would establish Antarctica as a Nature Reserve - Land of Science. The proposal for a convention has received considerable support amongst the parties to the Antarctic Treaty. We expect support for this proposal to increase as more and more countries come to understand the importance of protecting the world's only pristine continent and realise that this will not be achieved through the draft Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities.

New Zealand has recently changed its position and decided against ratifying the draft Antarctic minerals convention. It is also becoming increasingly unlikely that the United States will ratify the convention.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

The pressing need for an international collaborative approach for tackling many of today's environmental problems is now virtually unchallenged. Issues such as biological diversity and rainforest management, as well as the ozone layer and climate change are under discussion in many international organisations. Australia is continuing to play a leading role in these activities.

Ambassador for the Environment

The former Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephen, was appointed Australia's Ambassador for the Environment in July 1989. He is making an important contribution to Australia's efforts to influence international action to address global environmental problems by presenting Australia's viewpoint on these matters in international fora.

Last December Sir Ninian represented Australia at the World Conference on Preparing for Climate Change, in Cairo. Sir Ninian has also had meetings with ministers for foreign affairs and environment in Europe and the United States to explain the Australian-Franco initiative on the Antarctic. This year he will be active in promoting to the 37 Antarctic Treaty nations the advantages of supporting this initiative and having Antarctica declared an international nature reserve.

Rainforests

Rainforests are a rich source of biological diversity. And they are important for their effects on climate and soil, water and air quality. Rainforests in many countries are also a source of commercial timber. The effective management of rainforests has become a matter of international concern.

Australia has taken action to protect large areas of its own rainforests. In addition, it is providing assistance to help other countries improve the management of their rainforests.

Australia is providing \$100,000 in 1989-90 under the Tropical Forest Initiative for the provision of technical assistance for the management and protection of forests in tropical countries, with \$60,000 of this going to the International Tropical Timber Study in Sarawak. This study commenced in November 1989 with a visit to Sarawak by a study panel of the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO). The panel will report to the ITTO in May 1990.

Senator Cook has invited Papua New Guinea to participate in the initiative and has had direct discussions on the issue with Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai ministers.

The Amazon rainforests have received particular attention because of their size and relatively undisturbed nature. Australia donated \$250,000 to the Brazilian Rainforest Foundation on 11 September 1989 to assist with Amazon rainforest preservation by creating a large rainforest reserve. President Sarney of Brazil has agreed to form a commission to authorise the demarcation of land belonging to the Caiapo Indians, as requested by the Rainforest Foundation.

A number of organisations concerned with the rate of deforestation in tropical rainforest areas have pressed for restrictions on the importation of tropical rainforest timber. Last year the Government decided to commission a study on Australia's role in importing tropical timbers and the implications and efficacy of restricting imports. A draft report is now being considered by a panel of independent assessors whose comments will be conveyed to the consultants for consideration in preparing the final report. The report examines possible policy options and their impact on the resource base of the originating countries, as well as their implications for industry within Australia. The final report is expected to be released in April.

Research will play an important role in any attempt to improve management policies and practices. Australia will be providing \$1 million for the establishment and maintenance of the Institute of Tropical Rainforest Studies in Cairns. Of this amount, \$600,000 has been allocated for research and operation costs for the first year.

Biological Diversity

The Government is according high priority to the preparation of a national strategy on biological diversity and has been active in international efforts to preserve the planet's biological diversity.

Australia is taking a leading role in the development of an international convention for the protection of biological diversity, and will be offering to host a major international meeting in the process leading up to the adoption of the convention. In addition we will be hosting the annual meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, in Perth in November this year.

Australia has continued to work towards the completion of a bilateral agreement on migratory birds with the USSR. Informal discussions have also been held regarding a similar agreement with ASEAN.

We hope shortly to conclude consultations with the States which would enable us to accede to the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

The world is at risk of losing many of its species because of excess trading in either individual species or products derived from them. Australia is a strong supporter of the Convention on the Importation and Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) which endeavours to regulate the import and export of certain listed species.

Of particular concern to the international community has been the threat from the ivory trade to the existence of the African elephant. On 22 August 1989, I announced a ban on the importation of non-antique ivory. In October 1989, Australia supported a move to place the African elephant on Appendix 1 to the CITES Convention. This effectively prohibits the export and trading of all elephant species by signatories to the Convention.

A major threat to the future of marine resources, and the communities which depend on them, is the expansion in driftnet activity by distant water fishing fleets. Australia prohibited driftnetting in all waters within the Australian Fishing Zone as from 25 July 1989, continues to deny access by driftnet vessels to Australian ports, except in cases of emergency, and prevents transshipment of fish caught by driftnets in the Zone.

During my visit to New Zealand in February 1990 I signed, for Australia, a convention to ban driftnet fishing activities in the South Pacific. The Convention will be signed by all South Pacific Forum countries and protocols to the Convention will, when possible, be negotiated with fishing nations. I also announced an enhanced program of joint Australia-New Zealand driftnet surveillance and enforcement measures.

Australia has also supported a United Nations resolution committing fishing nations to cease driftnet fishing in the South Pacific by July 1991 (to cooperate in the development of a fisheries management regime) and to implement a moratorium globally by July 1992.

After previously agreeing only to limit the number of driftnet vessels, Taiwan has now agreed to comply with the United Nations resolution to halt driftnetting in the South Pacific by July 1991.

The Government pressed hard for a reduction in Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) quotas in discussions with Japan and New Zealand in October 1989. A reduction in the global quota of over 20 per cent has continued a series of reductions achieved since 1983-84. Following these quota negotiations, expenditure of \$0.7 million for 1989-90 has been allocated for further SBT research.

To help preserve biological diversity at home, funding for the first year of projects under the Endangered Species Program (ESP) has been approved. Approved projects under the ESP include a National Education Program and a number of major projects aimed at the control of introduced and noxious species.

The control of exotic and other pests and diseases is vital in maintaining the diversity of Australia's unique ecosystems. In addition to assisting with the battle against introduced species such as rabbits, cane toads and mimosa pigra, voluntary guidelines controlling the discharge of ballast from ships entering Australia have been introduced and a review of quarantine policy is currently being undertaken. Also, \$750,000 in additional funds will be provided for the period to June 1991 for a research program into the Crown of Thorns starfish. This program is now underway.

Aid

In further assisting developing countries in the South Pacific and South-East Asian regions to address environmental problems, \$4.4 million has been allocated for 1989-90 for bilateral projects through the Environment Assistance Program. An action plan has been developed to maximise the effectiveness of the Program and establish criteria for providing funds.

Further Progress Reports

The final section of 'Our Country, Our Future' committed the Government to ongoing reviews of the progress being made in implementing the undertakings given in that document. This is the first such formal review. Further reports will be issued periodically, to advise the community of progress being made in protecting our irreplaceable natural environment.

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