



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA
HON R J L HAWKE
DELIVERED AT LUNCHEON
HOSTED BY M. JEAN LEQUES
MAYOR OF NOUMEA,
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTHERN PROVINCE
NOUMEA - 28 JULY 1990**

Mr Mayor
Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for your hospitality and for the warmth of your welcome to Hazel and me. We appreciate very much the excellent arrangements that you - our near neighbours - have made for us in New Caledonia.

I do not believe that anyone visiting Noumea and meeting so many community leaders, as I have done this morning, could fail to detect the spirit of optimism that seems to permeate the community in New Caledonia.

I have been particularly impressed by the commitment displayed by all parties to the Matignon Accords, and by the determination to make them succeed.

For all these reasons, let me say that you have the respect of all Australians and our best wishes as you proceed with the important tasks ahead of you.

I commented last night on the stark contrast between the prevailing spirit of cooperation and shared endeavour, and the bitterness and futility that so damaged New Caledonia for much of the 1980s.

It is a truly significant achievement that peace and stability have been re-established in New Caledonian political life.

New Caledonia is richly endowed with two strong and deep cultural traditions. Both these flourishing cultures have an enduring contribution to make to the emergence of a single harmonious New Caledonian society. Both deserve full respect; both must receive full recognition.

And, equally important, you are now committed to a process that will lead to an act of self-determination in 1998.

As I said last night, Australia would have been uncomfortable - deeply so - with any outcome that denied such a choice to the people of this territory.

Of course there are profound differences between loyalists and independantists about what you see as the best long-term outcome. It is not for me to take any side in this.

But we welcome the fact - as do our Pacific neighbours - that a real act of self-determination will be made. And we welcome the prospect - flowing from the Matignon Accords - that when it is made this will be against the background of an experience of harmony and co-operation, not the hostility and bitterness of the past.

Our concern - both from the point of view of the territory and of the region generally - is that a viable future for New Caledonia must recognise the rights of the indigenous people and it must safeguard the rights of all other long-term residents.

I want to assure you that whatever the choice New Caledonians make in 1998 - and it is your choice, no-one else's - you can be assured of Australia's continued goodwill and friendly support.

You will find us a reliable friend of stability and a firm supporter of the processes of reconciliation.

It is of course a very natural thing that Australians should support you and should understand the significance of what you are trying to do.

That support and understanding springs from the deep roots of our common historical experiences.

Of course, we are different in size and economic diversity - not to mention that you are a French territory and we were British.

But the differences that arise from such circumstances are less significant than the enduring similarities between us.

When Europeans first came to our two countries they displayed and indulged a similar nostalgia for the Northern Hemisphere.

When Captain Cook landed on this island, he called it "New" Caledonia because the pine-clad ridges reminded him of Scotland.

In the same way, Australia had been given the early name of "New" Holland.

For that matter, Vanuatu was known as the "New" Hebrides, and "New" Zealand and Papua "New" Guinea received similar proofs that the Europeans saw these places as Southern Hemisphere replicas of Northern Hemisphere originals.

In fact, the new arrivals - arrogantly, but typically for their time - turned a blind eye to all the evidence that they were intruding onto the territory of cultures that had flourished here for millennia. The early Europeans in Australia were undoubtedly guilty of that.

In calling everything "new", the Europeans in the South Pacific were simply showing themselves as proudly self-conscious expatriates.

To speak of Australia, I have always felt that even though it is just over two hundred years since the arrival of the Europeans, we are in many ways a much "newer" society now than we were then.

This newness is not only measured by technology or education or economic strength, but, of critical importance, by the makeup of our people themselves.

We are a nation of immigrants. With particular rapidity since the Second World War, Australia has drawn immigrants from virtually every country in the world.

But as each new wave of people has arrived, the sense of being expatriates transplanted to a foreign soil has given way to a sense of belonging to, and commitment to, their new home.

We are not only a more talented and more dynamic community as a result of these diverse origins, we are also much more united and much stronger.

Let me say it again: our diversity, our multiculturalism, has become, for Australia, a great source of strength.

In that regard we are very much a "new" society - tolerant, harmonious and largely unfamiliar with overt communal violence and tensions.

That is why I said earlier that it is not surprising that Australians should understand and support you in what you are now trying to do in New Caledonia.

Because here, you too are building a new society and in doing so you are seeking strength through your diversity, and tolerance through honest talking and fair dealing.

I am not pretending in any of this that there are precise analogies between Australia and New Caledonia. I am certainly not laying down any detailed prescriptions about the future of New Caledonian society.

I respect you too much for that.

But I do believe this: we are going to be neighbours for a very long time.

We who live in the Pacific and who share this region understand well, I believe, that differences can only be solved, and long-term solutions found, through cooperation and mutual trust.

That is the single most important lesson of the Matignon Accords. And my discussions today have vividly shown me that this trust and commitment does exist.

The success of the Accords means that I can today address New Caledonians not as two divided rivals but as one emerging united community.

So what I have seen today - what I see when I look at this gathering now - are the faces of a truly "New" Caledonia.

That is why I believe the Accords do offer the best way forward for you. I earnestly hope - in the interests of all New Caledonians and the harmony and prosperity of the South Pacific region - that the effort will be maintained and the progress continued. I congratulate you on the success you are achieving.

* * * * *