



## PRIME MINISTER

### EMBARGO AGAINST DELIVERY

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP

1991 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS, GREAT HALL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA  
30 MARCH 1992

Thank you very much. It gives me great pleasure to be here.

This Landcare program is the product of the irresistible force of common sense.

It is an example of what can happen when groups when partnerships are forged in the national interest.

The average Australian would probably tell you that the ACF and the national Farmers Federation were sworn enemies.

Not so. They have come together in the interests of the country, formed a partnership of real strength.

That's why I say it gives me great pleasure to be here - at a ceremony where people who have made the national interest their common interest, receive acknowledgement.

At another function recently I spoke about the way in which the first Europeans to paint Australia painted it in the image of their own countries.

It took a century of experience for the vision of the Heidelberg school to emerge and with it, in the paintings of Roberts and Streeton and others, an image of Australia which could only be Australia.

The significant point is that the scenes they painted were those of European occupation - they were populated with Europeans, their animals, their work, their architecture, their values.

They were scenes of European Australians making this country in their own image - exploiting its resources and altering the landscape to suit their needs and fancies.

This produced wealth and comfort and gave us an enviable standard of living. It also produced terrible damage to the original environment - and gave us problems which threaten to undermine those achievements.

Before the New Right cry foul and call me an enemy of progress and a defiler of the memory of the pioneers, let me say that we are not about saying mea culpa - we are about rectifying the mistakes and finding new and better ways to go forward.

We know better these days and we've got to build on that knowledge.

Like the painters of the 1890s we now have a clearer vision.

We know we cannot literally do what we like with the land.

We can't make it alien to the prevailing environmental and climatic conditions.

We can't put it outside the boundaries of ecological and economic sustainability.

We must set about restoring the land, rebuilding its productive capacity, and its sustainability, and returning it to a state of ecological resilience.

I have never been one who subscribes to the theory that economics and environmental protection don't mix; the theory that it is matter of jobs versus the environment, green growth versus economic growth.

We do not need to lower our environmental standards to get greater production and greater economic growth.

It is not a case of us being unable to afford to protect the environment. In truth, we can't afford to degrade it.

This is crystal clear in the case of land degradation:

- . soil erosion,
- . salinisation as a result of tree clearing, irrigation and unsustainably heavy grazing,
- . soil acidification,
- . and changes in vegetation species in rangelands -

these have all cost us dearly, and continue to do so.

Land degradation has cost Australia billions of dollars in lost production, and ruined millions of acres of land.

The environmental losses have been economic losses. The environmental costs have been environmental costs. And for some time now, the environmental imperatives have become economic imperatives.

So allow me to say with pride that the nine-year strong Labor Government has been the first to develop a comprehensive policy to tackle this problem, and it is doing so with significant success.

Landcare has been a central part of this success. It is exciting, not merely because of its style, its broad base and its concept, but because of its results.

And it is not a static program.

It had a suitably co-operative, partnership-oriented beginning. It began with a joint approach to the Federal Government by the National Farmers' Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation.

The National Decade of Landcare Plan has been developed to provide a framework for action to achieve sustainable land use and rehabilitate degraded lands.

Concern has been expressed that there were problems for Landcare groups in getting access to Landcare grants programs.

So my Ministers Simon Crean and Ros Kelly worked in partnership to introduce simplified grants program arrangements.

And instead of having to approach a large range of Commonwealth agencies handling such programs as the National Soil Conservation Program, Save the Bush and One Billion Trees, groups can now get advice from a single location and fill in one form for one, community-based assessment process.

In the early 1980s, there were no Landcare groups. Now, there are more than 900. By 1995, there is likely to be another 300.

They are getting involved in a range of activities, and now recognising that they need to think beyond simple issues, and consider overall land use in an integrated way.

This trend to integrated management of our vital natural resources is recognised in the growth of catchment groups.

In the Landcare scheme we have something very Australian partnership, protecting something very Australian - our land - something economically and ecologically vital, something centred on Government engagement and community spirit.

That all appeals to me greatly, and we all owe those involved a hearty thanks.

To the members of the Landcare groups throughout Australia, I say that you are all winners. You can't lose doing what you are doing.

In a sense, the winners of the 1991 National Landcare Australia Awards are representing all the other winners throughout the rural communities of Australia.

I hope the award winners here tonight, and other Landcarers, get great encouragement and incentive from these awards, and I congratulate them all for their achievements. Australia is the richer for them.

Thank you.