



# PRIME MINISTER

**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
LAUNCH OF WASTE MINIMISATION AND RECYCLING STRATEGY, DARLING  
HARBOUR, SYDNEY 22 JUNE 1992**

Ladies and gentlemen

The Government's Waste Minimisation and Recycling Strategy is more than it seems.

This environment strategy is also an industrial strategy, and a social strategy.

In this way it goes to the heart of some of the key questions facing Australia today.

For instance, it is concerned with industrial modernity and efficiency. It will play a part in determining how significant our role will be in the modern world.

Increasingly this can be said of all good environment policies: they are not regressive, as the critics used to like to say, and as some of the more uncouth ones still do.

Strategies like this one do not advocate a more primitive way of life, but a more sophisticated one.

They do not deny development, but they say it should be intelligent.

They look forward not back - indeed, in the long term, they can put us ahead of the international competition and keep us there.

We are encouraging a more efficient use of resources which means less demand on our primary materials, and just as importantly, more emphasis on the productive or creative process.

Firms which engage in successful waste minimisation schemes have focussed on best practice. They are more likely to be more efficient in other areas, and more likely to recognise opportunities to create new ways of doing things and new products.

They are more open to change, and much more able to compete with the best firms internationally and domestically.

A commitment to waste minimisation and recycling commits government and industry to technology in ways we have not been committed before.

By way of example, in recent years Australia has become a world leader in waste water treatment and recycling for paper packaging.

There have been some outstanding technological advances in the recycling of other materials: in paper for instance.

The collection and recycling of waste paper has meant that:

- the pulp resource base of the country has been increased, which has helped us to replace imports.
- jobs have been generated, particularly in the labour intensive practice of recycling.
- exports have been generated, both through greater production and in the development of expertise in recycling technology.

Or take the classic example of slag from Australia's steelworks.

There is hardly a more striking symbol of industrial waste than a slag-heap.

But slag is now recognised as potentially high quality cement or aggregate, and new processes are now being put in place to exploit what was once the stuff of universal monuments to the ugly side of industry.

Ladies and gentlemen -

This strategy is another policy of imagination, for imagination. It will help put Australian industry in the realm of the creative.

Imagination in the area of waste minimisation and recycling can mean new industries, new export markets and new jobs.

Waste minimisation and recycling combines protection of the environment with competitive, efficient, expanding industries and a culture of creativity and adaptation.

This particular strategy, then, is a key development in, and compliments, our progress towards ecologically sustainable development in Australia.

It does not stand alone, even on the particular issues it deals with. There is a breadth to government actions on these matters.

Our comprehensive Land Care program, involving \$320 million over the decade of Land Care, is helping to make agriculture and farming sustainable and is reducing waste and pollution of water and air.

In regard to protection of the ozone layer we have been ahead of the pack in eliminating CFC's. Ozone depletion is a particularly insidious result of waste generation. And our strong and ongoing policies on the greenhouse effect will also lead to a reduction of waste production and pollution.

This waste minimisation and recycling strategy also goes to the heart of questions of social equity.

Environmental costs, after all, tend to be borne unequally across the community.

The better off can generally make sure they don't suffer from waste disposal problems. Poorer people often don't have the means to move away.

A national strategy like this one positively discriminates in favour of those who, since the beginnings of industrialisation, have borne an unequal share of a national burden.

It is a classic reform in the interests of the nation and in the interests of all Australians - a classic Labor reform.

Though conceived in advance of the February One Nation statement, it projects both the same broad national goals and the same means of pursuing them.

As I said, it is a strategy for the universal benefit of Australians.

It also seeks to include all Australians.

We want, and indeed the strategy depends upon, the active participation of industry and the community.

It depends on partnerships between business and local, State and Territory governments.

It sets out ways in which the bodies responsible for creating household, industrial and commercial wastes can minimise them, and recycle them when they are unavoidably generated.

It follows that every Australian is responsible for seeing that the strategy succeeds. The most important partnership of all is between Australians and their country.

If we all participate in recycling schemes, if we all seek out goods made from recycled materials, if we all take a care to minimise the amount of waste we produce, we will all share in the success.

We are seeking to change attitudes.

If we change attitudes we can not only improve the environment and the economy and the quality of our lives, I think we can help create a regimen of care for each other and the land we live in.

That, I think, is a major objective - and should be a major objective of all government policies.

Of course, in launching this strategy today, we should also recognise that what we do for the environment here we do for the environment globally.

Those wastes we call greenhouse gases, for instance, present a challenge to the whole world. We share the world's responsibility to limit them.

As a developed country we also have a responsibility to put ourselves at the leading edge of environmental problem-solving.

As the developing countries industrialise the scale of the problem is bound to grow - finding solutions, we can be sure, is a growth industry.

Ladies and gentlemen - we are accustomed to hear of the balance in nature, or the ecological balance, the delicate arrangement in nature which assures its continuation.

An equally crucial arrangement, and the one we urgently have to find, is the integration between the environment and what we make of it.

The integration of our respect for an environment unspoiled, our spiritual and physical need for such an environment, and our need for economic development.

We do need one as much as the other.

We need economic development for our survival as a nation, for the maintenance of our standard of living and, with that, our values and institutions.

We also need it, I believe, because it is in our nature to create and invent.

But in the debate about achieving the right balance, in searching for the inevitable and necessary compromises which will enable us to grow without degrading the world we live in - ultimately we come down on the side of the world.

I mean not just that we come down on the side of ecological imperatives, like breathing clean air, or reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

I mean that we should come down of the side of conservation rather than degradation, care rather than neglect, beauty rather than ugliness.

This strategy I think is notable for making those choices.

And I think it is consistently the case in good environmental policy that it advances the level of our sophistication when we decide about these balances.

When for instance, on balance, we decide against mines in Kakadu; or drilling on the Barrier Reef; or accepting a crude and environment-degrading pulp mill at Wesley Vale, when more intelligent applications of technology would make a better one.

So I welcome environmental debate in this country - I think it advances our level of civilisation.

We have been notoriously destructive of the natural environment - out of ignorance, carelessness and greed.

Nor have we cared as much as we should for the aesthetics of the environments we have built.

In a remarkably short time we have gone from being a country where space seemed limitless, and the environment incomparably beautiful and clean, to one in which landfill sites are becoming scarce and pollution of all kinds threatens the quality of many urban, rural and natural environments.

It's good for us now to think carefully about how we can not only make amends, but lead the world in strategies for the future.

What we have tended to take for granted in the past we must now take as responsibilities.

And again, I think it will do us no harm to be thinking about the future - and about the solutions the future will require.

It will be good for us to think about the way we should be developing our cities, for instance.

And it's good for us to be thinking along the national lines which environment policy demands.

And as we go about finding national solutions I think we should take a great deal of heart from our recent achievements.

Look back on the last ten years and you will see that we have done remarkably well in achieving that balance between development and the ecology - ecologically sustainable development - that I spoke of earlier.

For we have increased our levels of production - GDP has grown by more than a third.

And we have increased our manufacturing - our exports of manufacturing and services now outstrip mining and agriculture.

But we've also doubled the size of the protected wilderness area in Tasmania; trebled the size of Kakadu National Park and protected it by banning mining; protected the Wet Tropic area of Queensland; saved the Northern New South Wales rainforests; extended the Marine Park of the Great Barrier Reef region from 14 per cent to 98 per cent.

We've been international leaders in legislation to protect the ozone layer and led a world campaign to prevent mining in Antarctica.

We've developed a comprehensive energy conservation program and a ten year program to protect endangered species.

In the area of the environment, as in much of our social legislation, we are ahead of the world, and we should be proud of it, and encouraged by it.

We certainly shouldn't be tempted to wind back our commitment - either because they are too hard, or as some would have us believe, because in these difficult economic times we can't afford them.

The truth is we can't afford not to protect our environment, or to let future generations pay for our neglect and expediency, or to miss the opportunities which environmental imperatives offer to us industrially.

In 1992 nearly a tonne of solid waste will be produced per person in Australia.

This particularly ugly and potentially depressing fact has one thing going for it - we know it can be changed.

This strategy shows the Government has the will to change it. By many of its recent actions industry is showing it has the will to change it. By their responses the people of Australia also give every indication that they have the will.

We will change it.

Within the next few years that tonne of waste will be much reduced, and we'll develop both better technologies and better ways of living on this continent in doing it.

Perhaps within a decade or less the tonne of waste will have become a tonne of confidence in ourselves, and a tonne of faith in the nation.

Let me conclude by congratulating the people who by dint of good ideas and conscientious effort have come up with this plan for Australia.

Ros Kelly, of course, deserves much of the credit and much of the congratulations - particularly for the extensive discussions with industry which she held in 1990, and which went a long way toward establishing a common understanding in government and industry.

I congratulate all those who have been involved, and urge all Australians to take up the challenge.

This is a major step towards a better Australia.

And it is with great pleasure and pride that I now declare it launched.