



## PRIME MINISTER

95/92

### STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP AMBASSADOR FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Australia's first Ambassador for the Environment, Sir Ninian Stephen, is to retire from the post.

Sir Ninian, who has been Ambassador for the Environment since July 1989, recently informed the Government that his responsibilities as Chairman of Strand 2 of the Talks on Northern Ireland were now absorbing his time and capacities to such an extent that he believed it was no longer practicable for him to continue to hold the important post of Ambassador for the Environment.

In 1991, the Government agreed to a joint request from the Governments of the UK and of Ireland that Sir Ninian chair Strand 2 of the Northern Ireland Talks. In May this year Sir Ninian was granted leave of absence from his duties as Ambassador for the Environment for the duration of the Talks. In August Sir Ninian returned to Australia for consultations and the Government accepted Sir Ninian's view that it would be preferable for him to relinquish his role as Ambassador for the Environment and for new arrangements to be made, consistent with the high importance the Government attaches to the environment.

The Prime Minister paid tribute to Sir Ninian's significant contribution as Ambassador for the Environment. He said that Sir Ninian had carried out his responsibilities with great distinction, both overseas and in Australia. Sir Ninian had worked assiduously, consistent with the mandate given to him by the Government, to promote, both within and beyond Australia, the Government's

policies relating to matters affecting the global environment. He had represented the Government in bilateral and multilateral conferences and negotiations relating to the global environment, including leading Australian delegations to the preparatory conferences which preceded the June 1992 UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED).

Sir Ninian believes and the Government agrees, that he has fulfilled his role as Australia's first Ambassador for the Environment and it is now time to hand over to others who are, and will continue to be, actively involved in the long and demanding follow up to UNCED.

The Government has recommended the appointment of a senior career diplomat, Ms Penny Wensley, to succeed Sir Ninian.

Ms Wensley, who joined the then Department of External Affairs in 1968, is currently head of the International Organisations and Legal Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and has spent the past two years working on global environment issues. She was leader of the Australian delegation to the Inter-Governmental Negotiating Committee (INC) which negotiated the landmark Framework Convention on Climate Change and participated in the Australian delegation to the UNCED conference as Senior Foreign Affairs Adviser. Ms Wensley is well known to community and business groups with an interest in environment issues.

It is proposed that Ms Wensley be appointed as Australia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva in early 1993 where she will be particularly well placed to carry out the principal functions of Ambassador for the Environment of promoting Australia's policies on global environment issues and representing the Government at international conferences and negotiations relating to the environment. Many institutions and agencies handling the rapidly growing international agenda on the environment are based in or near Geneva and a considerable proportion of the follow up work to UNCED will be handled by Australia's Mission in Geneva.

Ms Wensley will return to Australia as appropriate to brief the Government and interest groups on global environment developments.

The Prime Minister said that an important function carried out by Sir Ninian had been that of liaison between the Commonwealth and non-governmental organisations. The Government attached the highest importance to maintaining an effective dialogue with interest groups in this area. Accordingly, the Government plans to establish new and enhanced formal arrangements for liaison with NGOs

on international environment matters. These new consultative arrangements will be determined on the basis of full discussion with all interested groups.

In announcing these changes, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the Government's strong commitment to the environment. He said that Australia has established a reputation internationally as a country committed to progressive and forward-looking environmental policies and ready to play its part in international efforts to address environmental problems and concerns. The Ambassador for the Environment has an important role to play in securing this image and in promoting Australia's interests in ongoing international efforts to develop and implement effective environment policies and strategies. The new consultative arrangements will ensure the views of the community will be well represented.

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