



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
ENVIRONMENT STATEMENT LAUNCH - ADELAIDE, 21 DECEMBER 1992**

Ladies and gentlemen

It's a pleasure to be in Adelaide. It always is.

As I have said before, it has always seemed to me to be a brave city built in an environment which is beautiful and benign, but very often not easy, and not infrequently harsh. A city poised between the desert and the deep blue sea.

In Adelaide, one is always aware of both the natural environment and the built one - the natural and the human heritage. It is the ideal place to launch this statement.

Ten months ago, in a completely different environment to this one, with the birdcalls coming only from the Opposition, I announced a package of Government initiatives under the name "One Nation".

The principle of One Nation was strength through partnerships. Partnerships of all kinds: between governments - local, State and Commonwealth - between business and government, between employees and employers, between community and nation.

The idea of One Nation was to lay the basis of a stronger Australia by calling on all our resources, human and material, our social and economic strengths, our intellectual strengths.

To include all Australians in the process of nation building: and, immediately, in the great effort to bring on economic recovery and the jobs that will go with it.

Today the effects of One Nation continue to be felt as the projects we announced get underway.

Just as importantly, I believe, the idea of One Nation has had some influence on the way we Australians think about the future.

I think One Nation went some way to extending the idea of cooperation which in the 1980s had developed so effectively in important areas of the nation's life.

I think it had some influence on the way we confront Australia's problems and work towards our national goals.

I say these things today because I think this Statement is concerned with one of our great national goals - the protection and rehabilitation of our environment.

I say it because in many important regards the Statement embodies the idea and the aims of One Nation.

And I say it because the spirit which One Nation invoked is already there in the national environment effort.

Today's launch is in part a celebration of the work already being done right across Australia, by local government, community organisations and individuals.

And I take this my opportunity to salute their work.

Nothing better illustrates the interdependence of Australians and their communities than the environment.

Nothing more emphatically makes the point that all our state borders and provincial differences still leave one fact unassailable - that this is one continent and one nation.

And, for good or bad, what we do in one part of it very often effects another.

What one Australian does to the environment effects another Australian.

It makes the point very clearly - what we do against each other weakens Australia.

What we do in partnership strengthens us all.

If there is a dominant theme in this Environment Statement it is Australia's soil and water.

Soil and water are basics of life. If we cannot guarantee their integrity we breach a fundamental trust to this and future generations, and to the land we call our own.

In doing so, of course, we also deny ourselves the product of the land. The degeneration of our soil and water has already cost us millions of dollars.

Whether it is in the colour and taste of Adelaide's water, or the blue/green algae on the Darling, the consequences of abuse and neglect also come at an incalculable cost to our confidence and self-regard.

In truth, I don't think we can spoil the essentials of life and degrade the land without depressing our spirit.

By now everybody is aware that the main focus of the Environment Statement is the Murray-Darling - our greatest river system, a huge national resource, and a part of Australia indelibly inscribed in our history and culture.

Nothing better illustrates the network of environmental interdependence than the Murray-Darling - a national artery which begins life in Queensland and sustains life in South Australia.

At present the Murray Darling is being seriously degraded.

No one should underestimate the environmental and economic costs of this degradation.

As the statement says: "This has already cost hundreds of millions of dollars, poisoned a wellspring of our heritage, and destroyed huge areas of formerly productive land."

At present, ten towns along the Darling are responsible for ninety per cent of sewage phosphate entering the river.

This will end.

With Australian technology we will eliminate these sources of pollution and so improve water quality and reduce the potential for blue/green algae.

While the repair and protection of the Murray Darling Basin is a centrepiece of the initiatives announced today, the Government's Statement reflects the fact that the community's concern and the environment's needs are broad, and getting broader. The Statement announces:

- . Our intention to create a national system of marine and land reserves.
- . A comprehensive study of the environmental and economic values of the Shoalwater Bay area.
- . The nomination of the Riversleigh fossil site and the Naracoorte Caves for World Heritage listing.
- . More research into alternative energy sources, such as ethanol and solar energy.
- . Four more Cooperative Research Centres with an environmental focus.
- . An additional eight million dollars for the control of weeds and feral animals, with another five million specifically for the control of *mimosa pigra* which is threatening to invade Kakadu.
- . Finance for the purchase of Calperum pastoral lease near Renmark to ensure its protection and sustainability.

State of the environment reporting and other educational tools necessary for Governments and the community to make informed decisions.

And of course a great deal more.

Not all of these are high profile or controversial matters, but they are all initiatives of substance, all initiatives which build on what we have been doing, all links in the environmental protection chain.

Of course there is more to be done than any Government could do in a Statement such as this.

But you can be assured that we will keep working away at the list.

For too long the myth that jobs and environmental protection are incompatible has tended to govern our thinking.

In truth, while some conflicts will inevitably remain for Governments and communities to resolve, it is increasingly evident that the economic sustainability of Australia is dependent on the environmental sustainability of Australia.

Whether you're talking about tourism or our rural industries, or vital water supplies, we are all now conscious of the need to maintain our natural resource base to sustain them.

In other cases, like waste management and re-cycling, the protection of the environment itself constitutes a booming industry.

The point is made in the statement: "the drive for environmentally friendly industries and the protection of our environment is part of the economic drive - part of the international competitive drive in which Australia is engaged."

So we will continue to look at ways to achieve the dual objectives of environmental protection and job creation.

I was very pleased to receive recently a proposal for a "green jobs" strategy jointly developed by the ACTU and the Australian Conservation Foundation.

You can be sure that the Government is well-disposed to this sort of initiative and we will be giving the proposal our urgent consideration and expect to be able to help bring the ideas to fruition.

Now no doubt there will those who say that an ACTU/ACF liaison is an unholy alliance.

But I would argue that in fact it is one of the natural partnerships on which we can build a national response.

Really, it is no longer acceptable, or even possible, to retreat to ideology or prejudice or slogans as far as the environment is concerned.

The environment is a central, main game issue in which all Australians are involved.

Living in the built environment might lead most of us away from this conclusion - but in fact, as the people of Adelaide would know very well, we who live in the towns and cities do not escape our relationship with the natural environment. We depend on it for our resources.

And for the national wealth in which all of us share.

For our recreational pleasure and spiritual inspiration.

For our soil, air and water.

The environment provides us with the basics of life.

This Statement is informed by that simple fact.

All our lives will be better and Australia will be stronger for the things that it will do.

Thank you for having me today.