



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
STATE LUNCHEON - WELLINGTON - 21 MAY 1993

It is both a great pleasure and an honour to be here today, in this famous capital of one of the world's oldest democracies.

I want to thank you for the warm welcome Annita and I have received.

This is my first overseas trip since the Australian federal election on March 13. Jim Bolger was among the first to telephone and offer his congratulations on the Labor Party's victory, and in doing so he renewed his invitation to visit New Zealand.

And I was very glad to accept.

We are old friends, New Zealand and Australia. Good friends. More serious friends than is commonly admitted. It is a friendship which goes well beyond rivalries in sport. And beers and wines, and sheep and racehorses and sopranos. And films.

It is a friendship which goes to a history which we substantially share, to trade and migration over two centuries, to shared experiences in peace and war, shared legends, shared values and aspirations - and in the 1990s, perhaps more than ever before, shared international interests.

Our friendship and the challenges we jointly face are reflected in the network of contacts which exist between Australian and New Zealand ministers, and which serves as a catalyst for continuous dialogue across almost all areas of domestic policy.

In the Closer Economic Relations Treaty we have a model form of agreement which has brought both our countries great economic benefits.

We have a long tradition of cooperation in defence.

These days the requirements of our common interests are met by a process of Closer Defence Relations, through

shared training, support and infrastructure and annual meetings of our defence ministers and service chiefs.

The quality of our defence partnership and the value of the contribution we each make to wider regional stability and United Nations peacekeeping depends on our maintaining credible defence capabilities.

These formal contacts are vital to the success of our relationship, yet in reality the strength of that relationship is substantially built on the less tangible facts of cultural exchange.

Indeed nothing has established the bond so much as the simple movement of people between our two countries. For so long there has been a steady flow - these days in Australia's direction, but at other times in our history towards New Zealand. And with the flow has come knowledge and familiarity, and we have learned from one another something about the contours of the Australasian mind.

For generations there has also been a trans-migration of ideas both ways across the Tasman: in literature and the arts, in academia, and in the realms of popular culture.

Australian culture continues to be enriched by the presence of talented and original New Zealand film-makers, artists, musicians and writers.

On the other hand Australian popular culture has for a long time permeated New Zealand.

I had no idea until very recently that New Zealanders of Jim Bolger's generation were raised on "Dad and Dave" and used to sit in school singing "The Road to Gundagai" and "Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree". And those of an earlier generation than Jim's read the old Australian bushman's bible - The Bulletin.

It has been a benign and democratic influence we've had, I'm sure.

Just as the pervasive influence in Australia of certain New Zealand political satirists has been a boon to us all.

In truth, where things really matter, at the heart of the relationship there really is a common cultural heritage: and the irrefutable measure of this is in those democratic institutions which serve and symbolise the faith in democracy and freedom on which both our nations are built.

It seems to me that paramount among all the things which unite us is the belief that Australia and New Zealand should be countries in which democracy, freedom and equality of opportunity are extended: and if there is one

thing which characterises the story of both countries it is the pursuit of those goals.

That was the other great trans-Tasman migration - the migration of progressive political ideas which has gone on for more than a century.

A lot of the people who carried these ideas with them were people from my side of politics: but there has always been something of a consensus - on both sides of the Tasman on both sides of politics - that Australia and New Zealand should be lands of opportunity in the front ranks of social progress. In the front ranks of progressive nations.

There is no better example of this ambition than the pioneering a century ago of women's suffrage. New Zealand and Australia - especially South Australia - led the world: and New Zealand, I have to concede, led South Australia by one year.

This year New Zealand is commemorating the centenary of women's suffrage. Today it has been my pleasure to present, on behalf of the Australia-New Zealand Foundation, a small contribution to the celebrations.

We start from what I think is inalienable common ground.

But of course it would be a mistake of epic proportions to imagine that there are not basic differences between us.

I'm inclined to think that these differences have their origins in environment and geography as much anything else.

From the beginning you can see in the work of those colonial landscape artists who travelled Australia and New Zealand, two entirely different countries.

And I think there is no doubt that in New Zealand they saw a landscape which conformed more readily to European ideas of grandeur and beauty than Australia did.

For all their understandable attachment to Britain and Europe, Australians have inevitably been shaped by a land which is emphatically like no other.

It has shaped our character and our institutions and it will continue to do so - and all the more as we at last come to just terms with the indigenous people of Australia.

For, in the process of reconciliation we have commenced, Australians have begun to increasingly appreciate the ancient and extraordinarily rich and adaptive culture of Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and

the contribution they have made to our understanding of ourselves and the continent we inhabit.

Australia's location so close to South-East Asia has also affected Australian perceptions. For a long while it gave Australians a feeling of insecurity: but in recent times that is changing and, in keeping with our best interests, we are engaging with Asia on a commercial, political and cultural level as never before.

Australia is also demographically different of course: Jim Bolger notwithstanding, Australia has always been more Irish; since the Second World War more European, and recently more Asian.

The development of a culturally rich, pluralist society - and a remarkably tolerant one - I count as one of Australia's greatest national achievements, and one of our great assets in the internationalisation of the Australian economy.

We see our future as being very much bound up with our region - with Asia and the Pacific - and we see our diversity as a great strength in this.

These same considerations have played a significant part in the recent development of the debate about the best means by which the unique reality of contemporary Australia might be best expressed and symbolised, and whether or not the time has come for a Federal Republic with an Australian Head of State.

There is also a growing awareness that how well Australia does in the world depends to a considerable extent on how we are known in the world, and that depends in part on the symbols and sense of our identity.

Our two nations have inevitably developed different perceptions and policies.

The Australian government and people have continued to place a high value on our security alliance with the United States. New Zealand has chosen a somewhat different path.

Domestically, the micro reform processes we have both pursued over the past decade have been pursued with different emphases and we have been led to different conclusions in a number of important policy areas.

My Government is committed to a social democratic Australia, a free market economy underpinning an egalitarian and inclusive social policy.

I don't think we need be anxious about the points at which our national lives diverge. There have always been differences. The friendship is made stronger by understanding them - by appreciating them.

Living in a vast and diverse continent, and, no less, in a federal system of government, one learns that lessons early in life.

We are two nations in a world which is undergoing profound change. Remote as we may seem from much of the turmoil, both Australia and New Zealand have recognised the need to engage with it and the roles we can play.

We have joined in international efforts to bring peace and security to the people of those countries which have experienced tragic and appalling war.

It seems to me that those same ideals of democracy and freedom which are the cornerstone of our two countries' history are present with our young men and women now serving with the United Nations forces in Cambodia and Somalia.

And I believe it is appropriate at this point to congratulate New Zealand for the role it is playing on the Security Council as it attempts to find effective international responses to extraordinarily complex situations.

As you will know from our discussions this morning Australia will continue to commit itself to the processes of CER which have already been so successful in stimulating trade and investment between our countries.

There will not be quick and easy solutions to everything, but everything that should be addressed will be addressed - and progress will be made.

Our determination to continue with our bilateral efforts is matched by our commitment to securing a successful conclusion to the Uruguay Round.

We confirmed this in our discussions this morning.

We also jointly recognise the need to build on the economic growth now occurring in the Asia-Pacific region.

I shall make the point this evening in Auckland that we should build on the success of CER to integrate more fully with the wider regional economy.

I am greatly encouraged by what has been achieved in recent months to advance the progress of APEC.

For both our countries APEC can be the avenue of the expanded commercial relationship we seek with the region.

The dialogue has now advanced to a point where I am confident that we will soon begin to see some practical measures emerge to permit liberalisation of trade and investment within the Asia-Pacific region.

Trade and investment cannot take place in a vacuum. I know we are agreed that in advancing our economic relations with Asia and the Pacific we should also be seeking to increase our political and cultural interaction.

I know we are both aware that our shared interest in the region will depend in part on the crucial factor of stability and prosperity.

We can work together to strengthen regional security and in so doing secure the basis of our own prosperity and that of the region. And I believe that our success in this will enrich our people in more than material ways.

I take the view that our efforts in Asia and the Pacific represent the greatest peacetime challenge in our nation's history.

It is the dawning of a new epoch in our history and, in no small way I believe, the fulfilment of our destinies.

There are those who see in this challenge a threat to our culture and values.

I say that as we succeed - as we are and as we will - we shall see that our success is proof of the strength of those values.

That is why I say we will be enriched in more than material ways - because it will lift our confidence, our self-esteem and our faith in those things which have emerged from our experience as Australians and New Zealanders.

Thank you.