



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP HEWSON'S SHAMEFUL SPEECH

Dr Hewson's address last night brought no credit to him personally, or to his party. It was a shameful speech confirming once again that the leader of the Liberal Party believes Australians share his incapacity to make reasoned and principled judgements on major issues.

Last night Dr Hewson sought to incite anxiety where there need be none, and attempted to play on fear and prejudice for which the majority of Australians have no use and which they have rejected throughout the Mabo debate.

He portrayed the Mabo challenge as something beyond the reach of Australians' intelligence and goodwill.

Most disturbingly, he cynically traded in distortions, misconceptions, untruths and downright lies.

Dr Hewson says Australians should worry about their homes and farms when he knows the Government legislation provides security.

He says Australia's challenge is to respond to the High Court - yet he seeks to deny the Court's judgement.

He says we can't undo the past - yet nobody is suggesting that we try to. What we seek is an acknowledgement of past injustice, but most importantly, a future built on justice.

He says we must recognise the "possibility" of Native Title - yet he supports Premier Court's legislation which will wipe out the possessory rights of Aboriginal people.

He says we should respect our Constitution - what he really means is he will stand by and let a state abolish Native Title.

He speaks of his visits to Aboriginal communities - but didn't have the courage to tell them he would sell them out in the Parliament.

He cries crocodile tears about living conditions in some Aboriginal communities - then questions the money spent to help improve them.

He says Mabo won't do anything about Aboriginal education, health and welfare - but Mabo is about land and the High Court decision, which Dr Hewson says our legislation goes beyond, is about land.

He argues that States should have control of land management - when he knows the Government's legislation specifically provides for States to retain powers over the economic use of land.

He criticises the Government's decision to provide compensation for potential Mabo claims on titles issued between 1975-93 - does he want private landholders to foot the bill?

He says land will be locked up from economic development - when he knows that nothing will be locked up. The Bill provides for Ministerial overrides to permit economic development to proceed in the national and State interest.

He says valid leases of pastoral land made prior to 1975 may be subject to claims for Native Title - when he knows this is a downright lie. The Bill specifically protects valid leases.

He says providing more land for Aborigines is "more important" - but criticises the Government's intention to establish a land acquisition fund. If more land is to be provided, how will it be done without money?

He says the Commonwealth and States must work together - seven of the eight States and Territories are working together with the Commonwealth.

He says the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be respected - all rights, it seems, except their right to land.

He decries the "handing over" of land - he means that land rightfully belonging to Aboriginal people should be denied them.

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