



EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY

**PRIME MINISTER**

**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
AUSTRALIA DAY, ADMIRALTY HOUSE, SYDNEY  
26 JANUARY 1994**

Ladies and gentlemen

It is traditional to make personal resolutions on the first day of the year. On the 26th day we Australians could do worse than to make our national resolutions - our collective, corporate resolutions.

By the 26th January, we have had our break from work - most of us. Mercifully free from work and politics, we have had time to reflect.

On the beaches, in the bush and the backyard we have communed a little with the country and our countrymen and women. We have travelled the highways, seen a bit more of the place, got the feel of it again.

We have watched Australians furiously competing on land and sea and, who knows, seen in them some reflection of ourselves or something we would like to be.

If we have been among the countless thousands who use the holidays to go to galleries, theatres, museums and festivals of all descriptions, the chances are we have ever so slightly re-adjusted our conception of what Australia means and what it means to be Australian.

And in general I suspect that, whatever we have done, the majority of us have returned to work renewed in the belief that, on balance, there is no better place to live than this. Yet it is also true that many Australians will go back to work this year uncertain of the future.

Many Australians will return unconvinced that we have made the most of what we have, or that we can shape our destiny.

The truth is too many have reason to be unconvinced. And too many have no work to return to.

Ladies and gentlemen

The view from here, across the harbour to the nation's birthplace, can only inspire confidence.

We can stand here and admire the beauty of it, and all the symbols of our energy and growth, and justly say that Australians have created a great, vigorous and rich society.

But this view is not available to all Australians. The view varies - from suburb to suburb, town to town, workplace to workplace, farm to farm across the continent. Too often the view takes in hardship, discrimination, and waste.

The view depends on the limits of opportunity - it depends on the extent to which communities and individuals have weathered change and the recession, the degree to which they have it within their power to adapt and renew themselves.

It depends on industry and investment, on employment and educational opportunities.

It depends, therefore, on the extent to which we - all of us - are prepared to say that, vast and varied as the continent is, this is one nation and all are part of it.

It depends on the degree to which we are determined to balance the principles of freedom and individuality with the principles of fairness, care and responsibility. In that balance, it seems to me, lies the principle of nationhood.

This year the lesson has surely never been clearer.

As the New Year unfolded and we enjoyed all the traditional pleasures of an Australian summer, not for the first time we were stopped short by the spectacle of our fellow Australians desperately defending lives and property.

The bushfires in New South Wales, like the floods in Victoria a few months earlier, were a reminder that we live in a land which is plentiful and benign yet also cruel and unforgiving.

But Australians have known that since the first months of settlement across there at Sydney Cove.

The real lessons of the fires seem to me to lie in our response.

Seeing the landscape ravaged by fire reminded us of our love for it.

Seeing men and women fighting to save lives and homes and all the products of their labour reminded us of the ties that bind Australians wherever they live.

And seeing them triumph reminded us of what we can achieve when we are moved by these affections and work together.

In the end it was a triumph of experience and commitment, of the things we know and the things we feel about Australia.

The response was magnificent. The hindrances to effort and efficiency in the normal course of our affairs appeared to vanish.

State rivalries were put aside.

The bureaucratic black holes and red tape were replaced by dedication and urgency.

Suddenly there was not a hint of cynicism in the media.

And when it was over, even as we counted the losses, we knew the remarkable thing was how much had been saved.

It was a victory. And our faith in ourselves was stronger.

It seems to me that we can very usefully take the lessons into 1994 and beyond.

We have been through a decade of change and through three years of economic recession. We now have an economic recovery - a broad, strong recovery - and, because of our efforts, before us lies an era of immense opportunity.

We have on our hands what we haven't had for over a quarter of a century - a strong low inflation recovery which gives us the potential to make the balance of the 1990s one of the best periods of opportunity this century.

But we should be in no doubt that this recovery was won by our own exertions.

We got here by virtue of our collective will, our collective faith, our collective ability to think and fight our way through it.

What we make of our opportunities in the nineties will equally be a product of our collective effort.

And I think there is another lesson we cannot fail to see.

As this economic recovery gathers strength we will hear some people begin to say - in fact we are already hearing them ever so faintly - let's not worry about the unemployed, or the communities which are not doing so well.

Let's not pause to take them with us or we might lose momentum.

Let's leave them to take their chances in a reinvigorated market place.

Every time we hear this said, we should remember the bushfires.

We can no more abandon the unemployed or struggling communities than we could have abandoned those in the path of the fires.

Our sense of justice tells us that we cannot turn our backs on them: but so does common sense, the sense which tells us that an injury to one group of Australians is an injury to all, and that we are all strengthened when we act in concert.

This must not be a recovery for some and not others.

It must not be a top-end-of-town recovery. It will not be for making paper fortunes at the expense of productive investment which will deliver wealth and jobs in the long term.

The recovery must reach into every community.

It must give hope and opportunity to all Australians.

It must give every Australian the chance to benefit and contribute.

On this Australia Day 1994, on the most sober understanding of the realities, we might reasonably resolve to make this one of the great years in our history.

We might reasonably think that 1994 can be the year on which a future generation might one day look back and say - that was the year when the decision was taken: the year, when, without ceremony or fanfare, or any campaign to drive them, in government and boardrooms, workplaces and communities the people of Australia resolved not to waste the chance which this economic recovery offers us.

It can be the year, I'm sure, when as a people and a nation we decide that we will build on the hard work of the last decade:

- that we will make sure the burden of change and the burden of recession which the country has borne will not be for nothing or for a few
- that we will not squander our energy and wealth in corporate greed, or sectional interest, or bureaucratic inefficiency or provincial rivalry
- that we will not retreat from the future, or fear it, but take it on and shape it in the image of our traditions, beliefs and affections for Australia and all its people.

It can be the year in which we recognise as rarely before in our history, the common cause among us and pitch in for the future of Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen

On Australia Day we honour an Australian who by personal inspiration and effort has made an outstanding contribution to the life of the nation.

It seems to me that the Award of Australian of the Year and Young Australian of the Year illustrates the point I have been making today.

These awards are for great individual achievement, but more often than not they go to men and women whose efforts have been directed towards helping and inspiring others.

We honour them on Australia Day because by their example they deepen our faith in Australia and strengthen the ties between us.

Thank you.