



Embargoed Until...7:20pm...

## PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP

NATIONAL LANDCARE AUSTRALIA AWARDS

29 MARCH 1994

Thank you all for coming tonight.

The fact that some of you have come a very long way to be a part of this event indicates how widely the Landcare movement has spread in Australia.

This success is, on the one hand, proof of the need for better land management in Australia; on the other, and perhaps more importantly, it is proof of the care Australians feel for their country.

An environmental consciousness is not new in Australia, but what we have seen in recent years is an awareness of the need to preserve the environment of Australia allied to the knowledge that it is an economic, and indeed a social imperative.

When we move to save a damaged or threatened environment, like that of the Murray-Darling, for instance, we are acting to save industries, families and communities.

If we move cleverly we can do more than save: we can increase productivity, create new industries, restructure local economies, revive regions, and give a lot of Australians - particularly young Australians - new jobs and opportunities.

In other words, when we recognise the problems of salination or any other form of land degradation, or the means by which an improvement to the environment can translate into increased productivity, we recognise the fundamental link between the environment and the quality of our national life - including that which underpins it, our national economy.

That is precisely the new consciousness which Landcare manifests. Everyone who joins a Landcare group has recognised the link between self-interest and the interest of the environment - community interest, the national interest and the interest of the environment.

And I might say that if Landcare and these awards help to show Australians that they are all linked by their relationship to this unique continent - if they help to unite us on this basis - they will have done Australia a great service.

I think it also should be said that one of the great things about Landcare is that individuals and communities are driving it.

It has not been an easy couple of years on the land, with falling commodity prices and extended drought in at least two States.

But, far from discouraging Landcare projects, this hardship appears to have made the network flourish.

Landcare is one of the great movements of our time because the energy is coming from people with an affection for the country coupled to a belief in its future.

And the future is most certainly there. In the food industry, for example. There are strong signals abroad, identified by the Agri-food Council, that demand is likely to increase for clean, green food products - that is, food produced by the most environmentally friendly methods.

That means potential for exports and jobs. New hope and opportunities for people on the land. Potential to invigorate regional Australia.

The fact that one farming family in three is involved in Landcare goes a long way towards putting Australia in a position to realise this potential.

I said in the Government's Environment Statement in December 1982: "The drive for environmentally friendly industries and for protection of the environment is..part of the economic drive - part of the international competitive drive in which Australia is engaged."

The success of Landcare is testament to the speed with which that message is spreading through Australia.

The fact is Landcare's achievements are bigger and better than were ever envisaged. So successful has Landcare been, demand is outstripping supply.

But that goes for every successful program - and it certainly does not mean what a press report today took it to mean.

It does not mean there is a funding crisis, or that Landcare is about to collapse.

The Government is presently spending far more than it committed for the decade of Landcare.

We are very much aware that our commitment to Landcare needs to be maintained: that we need to make the structure and administration of Landcare programs more effective, but not weighed down with bureaucracy; that we need to keep the long term funding up - and, of course, that we need to continue to spread the message of the link between land conservation and improved production.

We need all Australians to understand the basic principles of Landcare.

- . We will get the best out of our country if we understand it and care for it.
- . We will get the best out of ourselves if we live in harmony with the land.

Ladies and gentlemen

Tonight you will meet the new Federal Minister for the Environment, John Faulkner.

John Faulkner has proved himself a very capable and popular minister for Veterans Affairs. Veterans are not always easy to please.

But - with that highly desirable mix of ideas, commitment and wise and practical judgement - John Faulkner has pleased them.

Environmentalists also are not always easy to please. Nor are their opponents. And it is not always easy to bring together.

John, I am quite sure, has the qualities needed to get the results we need - not ones which will please everybody, but ones which are good for the environment and good for the country.

It is an irony that, because we have so many programs already in place and so many achievements already under our belt, the Government these days is not getting much credit for environment policy.

In fact a great deal has been done and a great deal continues to be done.

I know that John, like me, is very conscious of the contribution made by the people who preceded him.

Graham Richardson's work needs no further commendation from me. It is enough to say that he made the environment a primary policy area for this Government.

I don't think it will hurt any of us to recall what Ros Kelly achieved.

Among other things, she implemented the Endangered Species Legislation, established the Feral Pest Program, made major advances in World Heritage listing and protection of Australia's most special places, such as Shark Bay, Fraser Island and Stage 3 of Kakadu, and established Ocean Rescue 2000 - the Commonwealth's first marine conservation program.

She also recognised the natural progression to the so-called "brown agenda" - the hard, dirty issues facing Australians every day but which Australian governments had not tackled so seriously before.

While Ros Kelly was Minister, Government policy reflected this.

We established the Commonwealth Environment Protection Agency, developed the first National Strategy on Waste Minimisation and Recycling, took head-on the issue of lead pollution, established national targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and undertook the massive task of restoring the health of the Murray-Darling.

I hardly need to tell people like yourselves, who are involved in environmental projects, that we cannot announce new programs and new projects every day. You know better than most that starting an environmental project or program is one thing and seeing it through is another. We are seeing them through.

So we have, after the contributions of these two Ministers, measures for a great range of environmental issues.

We have available an increasing range of assistance to meet objectives similar to those of Landcare - for example, programs such as LEAP, which is being creatively used to support a Greening Australia project in the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales which I visited recently.

Yet for all the Government's initiative, and all the Government's financial commitment, for all the Government's effort on scientific research and education, we can never eliminate the legacy of environmental problems without initiative, commitment and effort from individuals, companies and communities - like those associated with Landcare.

Like most things in the life of a nation, there is much that Governments can and should do, but so much more that people can do better.

Ladies and gentlemen

Tonight, for the third time the achievers of Landcare Australia are being honoured.

But I would like to say that in honouring these Australians we are paying tribute to all those involved in Landcare - for, by the fact and the nature of their involvement, they are all achievers.

Later, I will have the task of congratulating the winners of this year's awards.

Right now, I should acknowledge the generous contributions made by Landcare's major sponsor, Telecom, along with Monsanto, Combined Rural Traders, Ford, Ansett, BHP, Alcoa and the National Landcare Program itself.

I must also congratulate Bob Collins, the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, on the leadership he has shown in the National Landcare Program.

And Jim Kirk, whose departure from Landcare I understand is imminent.

The success of the Landcare network is by definition a tribute to the person at the helm.

Jim will leave Landcare with the outstanding reputation for business and community leadership he already enjoys substantially enhanced.

Ladies and gentlemen

Our economy is now growing faster than any in the western industrialised world. The prospects for an era of prosperity and national growth and development have few parallels in our history.

The issue at the heart of Landcare is at the heart of those prospects.

In the environment statement of 15 months ago I said this:

In the next decade the pioneering spirit will be carried on by Australians who these days work on the frontiers of technology and seek new ways to grow, or make or mine things. Economic growth and the jobs which accompany it will increasingly go hand in hand with environmental protection and renewal. The old war with the environment will be replaced by a partnership in the national interest.

Nowhere is that partnership stronger than in Landcare.

I congratulate and thank you all.