



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
SPEECH AT "GENAREN", NARROMINE NSW
LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL LANDCARE PROGRAM GRANTS 1994-95
24 AUGUST 1994**

Well thanks very much, Michael and Kylie. Don and Megan Sutherland, the Shire President, Robert Wilson. Robert, thank you for coming out today. The other 12 neighbours who have supported this project, and the volunteers, the LEAP volunteers and the Australian Trust for Conservation volunteers, and ladies and gentlemen.

Well, it's a great pleasure to be involved with a project like this as the occasion for announcing the grants for 1994-95, that is the community grants component of the National Landcare Program of \$5 million to fund 711 new community environment projects around the country. And there needs, with any such announcement, some indication of what these funds are for, and how they are spent, to communicate what they mean and to enthuse the country and the community with the need to be doing these things. And I'm delighted to be at "Genaren" today to see the preservation of this remnant bush, which has been in some respects, preserved by the fact that the Sutherland family have farmed this area for so long, and where they have very low stocking levels, and the consequence of all this has meant that there is something here that we can draw from and build upon in seeing this project some to fruition. And it's a great thing, I think, that Australians are so committed and to see volunteers as we are seeing them, help in erecting this fence which, already five kilometres of which is built, and it's going to be, I think, six, around 400 hectares, or if you still speak in acres as I do, 1000 acres, which is a large lump of country. To see what can happen when we allow nature to prevail and the natural species to live in harmony with the property.

I suppose it's a commentary on where we've come as a country in rural terms, that we are celebrating the preservation of 1000 acres of remnant bush. One would have thought that with a country so large as this that there would have been many areas so preserved. But this has not been so, with land clearing and with the practices over the last century, and particularly with the

introduced species - the foxes and the rabbits and the feral cats - which have done so much damage to the native species, and that effects of course the flora, and that changes the whole balance of the area. And I'm very interested in Michael saying that they intend now to introduce wallabies back into the area, which have an impact upon the flora which itself will then set up other balances in the area. It's such a large piece of land, it's going to be a very interesting experiment, I think, to see what exactly can be done and what can be achieved in something so representative as this.

Now, in announcing these projects for 1994-95, it means that we'll be doing similar things across the country. The important thing, I think, is the awareness of the land and the respect for the land which the Landcare program is, in a sense, inducing. But of course the program is one thing - it means nothing without the people. And leadership always matters - it matters everywhere, and it matters in this as in everything else.

And I think that the leadership which Michael and Kylie are showing here is going to be important to this district because there is a view that the city slickers have sort of got hold of this issue and we people on the land shouldn't really be, basically, pushed around by these sort of programs. But when you see people who have farmed areas for so long, as is the case of this family for a century or so, showing that leadership and also beyond simply the Landcare project itself into enhanced conservation of the property, of the sensible management of water, of care and protection against erosion, care about stocking levels, balancing that part of the property which is under pasture and that which is not, this is the sort of leadership that Australia needs in rural Australia. And that, I think, is going to make the difference across the country. The Commonwealth can help, with its programs, but this is essentially a community thing.

And it's where, I think, rural Australia and people in the countryside of this nation of ours are saying that the community alone can do this, we need some financial assistance from the government but it is not a claim or a call on the government to go and do something. It is, essentially, a call to an enhanced understanding and appreciation for the land which is ours. So, I am absolutely delighted with the level of commitment and the leadership - particularly by young people such as Michael and Kylie - and the interest in the species of flora and fauna which is so evident in Michael's remarks. This is the sort of, if you like, educated enthusiasm which is going to make this program and this sort of thing, work.

I hope that as we grow and prosper, as we learn more, that we come to know that the indiscriminate clearing of land is a danger to us, that it threatens the ground, that we have developed ourselves now as a major producer of wool in the world, that the country has actually made the transition to hard hoofed animals, from the native soft ones. And yet, we can do that and survive the experience of that change if we are careful about how we do it. And, it is that, I think, engendering that sort of spirit that is going to make the difference.

Now, I know that it is hard to engender spirit in difficult times. And, particularly with the drought. Drought coming and going in some areas, in one year, off the next, back the following year... It is very dispiriting, destroying farm incomes, creating a lot of rural poverty. And, the point I was trying to make a week or two ago is, I think, that we have to regard the drought as something that is around, in places, most of the time, coming and going. And, we need programs to deal with it as well as the funding which the Commonwealth announced - my colleague, Bob Collins, announced a week or so ago \$13.89 million for exceptional circumstances funding for the drought where it hits an area particularly hard. And, as you know, we are adjusting the Rural Adjustment Scheme (RAS) seeing where you have viable farms but they take a knock in some particular year, that there is some financial assistance to be able to meet some of those costs to keep the bank happy and to keep the business on the road. That, I think, is the challenge.

It is probably true, though I'm not the one to say, that weather patterns have changed, that we are in a cycle we may have been in at other times in this century where drought is around quite often. And, I think, we owe it to the rural community of this country, to those people who are in very viable country, particularly, and even those at the margins who can generally survive from one season to another, to help them through with assistance. That's why we're keeping the RAS scheme and its application under review, and why we are seeking to get some sort of uniformity in its application across the states so that in one state, and not another, people are being treated more generously than somewhere else.

So, there are a few bright spots on the horizon. Wool prices have picked up and that is going to make a difference to rural incomes. We've been seeing prices around 700 cents for certain categories of wool which is a substantial improvement on what we've seen. We're still living, of course, and have been, with the overhang of the wool stockpile but that is being managed and we've got, after all, the premium fibre in the world. We produce it in this country and we're the best at it. So, that is a strong thing for us and, of course, the grain markets of the world are essentially insatiable and that depends, of course on good seasons and some innovation in the way we crop this country. At any rate, one has to be, despite the problems, an optimist about the future in terms of rural industry with an improvement in the general understanding of the marketing of our various major commodities. And, a willingness - certainly on the part of the federal government and I am sure the state governments too - to help farmers where help can be really valuable in getting them through a difficult period where drought has been about.

So, today, I think, we have some things to celebrate and this project here at 'Genaren', the preservation of this remnant vegetation of what it would have been like... We're seeing here what we might have seen right across this region of NSW, in various ways, the natural bushland, which has, because of enlightened management been preserved - enough of it preserved - to let it regenerate back. And, I certainly congratulate Michael and Kylie, all those

owners nearby who are committed to this and to the volunteers who have their heart and their faith in Australia, in the value of the land and our respect for it and wanting to put something back. It is your leadership that is going to make the difference. And, congratulations to you, one and all.

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