



## **PRIME MINISTER**

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
CITIZENSHIP PROMOTION LAUNCH  
SYDNEY TOWN HALL, 4 NOVEMBER 1994**

It is a great pleasure to be here, on this very happy occasion.

My first duty is to congratulate all those who are becoming Australian citizens today.

I have no doubt it is a great moment for all of you. And I can also say it is a great moment for all of us who are sharing it with you.

Words like pride come to mind. It is a proud moment. But there is much more than that at work here today. The feelings go much deeper than pride.

Today we are seeing people from an extraordinary variety of cultures and countries, and an extraordinary variety of professions embrace Australia. And we are seeing Australia return the embrace.

It is a ceremony with the elements of a marriage about it – and a homecoming, and a family reunion, and a graduation ceremony.

Whatever it is, the feeling is a very warm one.

Perhaps "sharing" is the operative word.

People who decide to take out Australian citizenship decide to share in the responsibilities of being Australian.

And in return Australia offers a share of the rewards.

And a share of the pleasure too, I hope.

We sincerely trust the pleasure will be lasting – that whenever you say "I am Australian" you will feel proud to say it. That it will mean to you something special.

It does not mean that you are accorded some elevated status in the world, rather that you now acknowledge as your home a country which is free and democratic, tolerant and just.

It does not mean that you have renounced the inheritance of custom and tradition you brought with you to Australia, rather that you have adopted as your home a country which respects the diverse cultural inheritance of all its citizens.

You have lost something, but, we might say, you've gained a whole country.

Nothing is asked for in return except your loyalty, that you keep faith with the pledge you are taking.

There is a real sense in which it can be said that when you take that pledge all Australians take it.

The rights and responsibilities which you have taken on are borne by all Australians – and no Australian and no Australian government can ever take them for granted.

It is not enough to merely say we subscribe to these values – we should live by them, we should teach them, we should pass them on, we should enshrine them in our institutions and laws, we should be prepared to defend them.

We have an extraordinary opportunity in Australia.

We have the chance in the last decade of the century to pull the threads of our nationhood together: not into a monocultural, monolithic society, or into the shape of the classical nation-states of the past century and a half.

The catchword is not uniformity, but difference. It is not conformity, but creativity. It is not exclusive, but inclusive. Not closed to the world, but open to it.

It is true we need the things a nation needs.

We need a sense of common purpose, we need the ties of fellow feeling to unite us, we need belief and loyalty.

But these days we must surely recognise that we are increasingly united by the pride and the pleasure we take in multicultural Australia: our respect and enthusiasm for cultural diversity has become a defining element of Australia's national sentiment.

That is what we find so moving about this ceremony. That is what unites us today.

I am sure the warmth is the warmth we feel when we welcome someone to our family. The pride is in seeing Australia – in idea and reality – mediate such vast cultural difference. So that men and women from Egypt, or Bangladesh, or England, or Russia, Indonesia or Peru can, without losing any of their individual identity, identify themselves in common as Australians.

If this does not inspire warmth and pride, what does?

I have a feeling it is a variety of what one writer, Mary Kalantzis, recently called "a postnationalist sense of common purpose".

This is not to cast off older Australian traditions or institutions which serve us well. It is not to devalue the culture that has grown here.

In fact I am quite certain we will see those traditions strengthened in coming years – modified in places, inevitably, but strengthened in their essentials.

Because it is those essentials – the essentially democratic, tolerant and pragmatic nature of them – which has made the transformation to a multicultural Australia possible.

Contemporary Australia is built upon them.

Now we have the chance to make our multicultural society, and the tolerance and openness on which it has been built, a recognised and recognisable element of Australian nationhood.

If we can do this it will fit us very well for the modern world in which the barriers between nations are dissolving and culture, communications and services number among the most valuable commodities a country can have.

It will serve us marvellously in this regard and it will guarantee an Australia which is not only culturally rich but socially cohesive and harmonious.

Just as importantly, it will mean an Australia which counts among its primary values the capacity to find practical ways to mediate differences – not just ethnic or cultural differences, but the differences between men and women, between urban and rural Australians, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Because we want to invigorate our national life and national consciousness this year we established a Civics Expert Group, invested with the task of finding out how much Australians know about their country and its traditions and institutions. We have also asked them to tell us what is the best way to fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

For the same reason we have taken on a major promotion of citizenship. We want to see a very large percentage of the million residents who are eligible for citizenship take the step that the people here today are taking.

It will mean no less to their heritage and individuality, but a great gain to the country in which they make their livelihoods and homes.

The country which demands they leave nothing of their heritage behind unless it includes hatred and violence.

That is another step we have taken: we will introduce a Racial Vilification Bill to protect Australians against those few who would incite racial hatred.

The Bill is not for the purposes of punishing common prejudice. It is to protect innocent men, women and children against fear and intimidation. All Australians are entitled to freedom from fear.

The legislation embodies a warning to those who might attack the principal of tolerance on which our society is built, and an assurance to those who might be their victims.

It is something of a safety net for multicultural Australia. The expression in law of those things which today we pledge our belief in.

Laws like pledges are necessary expressions of belief.

But ultimately what matters most is the energy and imagination of people.

In the Australia of my imagination people will continue to believe in their citizenship deeply, yet wear it lightly.

I hope that is the message we all take from here: let us not be too pious about it, and let's keep the flag-waving and drum-beating to a respectable minimum.

Let's simply rejoice in the fact that being Australian is a very good and fortunate thing to be.

Thank you.