



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
OPENING OF THE MCARTHUR RIVER MINING PROJECT,
NORTHERN TERRITORY, 6 SEPTEMBER 1995**

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Thank you indeed, Administrator, Chief Minister, Ambassador Hasegawa, your colleagues Mr Kohno and Mr Sakamoto, the Chairman of Mt Isa Mines Mr Bruce Vaughan, distinguished members of the company, my ministerial colleagues who are with me - Laurie Brereton and Bob Collins - Barry Coulter Minister from the Northern Territory involved with the project, Warren Snowdon the Member for the Northern Territory, members of the Government of the Northern Territory, other distinguished representatives and ladies and gentlemen.

It has been a great pleasure for me to be able to come here today, to participate in this project which, I think, many will see as part of the renaissance of one of Australia's great mining companies - Mt Isa Mines. This is a company with a great tradition in mining in this country. One that goes back many years to that great deposit at Mt Isa and the mining of it and in other important projects and that great pioneering and adventurous spirit which we have seen from this company and from Australian mining.

I think we are seeing something new today. We are seeing the adventurous spirit of Australian mining coupled with a new understanding about the environment, new technology and social responsibility. That is what, I think, makes this project so significant. It is not just another project. It is a project which might not have happened though it always had the potential to happen. It has happened because people wanted it to happen. Governments wanted it to happen. The company with this technology wanted it to happen and they found a partnership again with our great partners in Japan to make it happen. All of these things, I think, are milestones in its future.

Mr Freund (Executive General Manager, Project Development, MIM Holdings Limited) was kind enough to mention *One Nation* and yesterday I had the pleasure of opening the new international terminal in Brisbane which was part of the *One Nation* program as well. A month earlier, I had the pleasure of joining Laurie Brereton on the *One Nation* train which for the first time carried freight from Brisbane to Perth via Melbourne on a single gauge and which

tied the country together as never before and yesterday I reminded people in Brisbane that in *One Nation* we removed the interface between the domestic and international carriage of passengers, where we folded Australian Airlines into Qantas and then made it a strong private company, where we are now trying to build Ansett as an international as well as a domestic company. We saw *One Nation* as pulling Australia together - the very name underwrote the concept - and at the same time kick start the economy which it did and since then, of course, we have had 16 consecutive quarters of growth. Four straight years of growth. It is the longest phase in Australian growth in 25 years with low inflation at around 2.5 per cent.

We are now outgrowing most other western economies and as a consequence we have had huge employment growth at around 4 to 5 per cent employment growth, around three times as much as most other comparable industrial societies.

As a consequence of *One Nation* we introduced something to kick start projects such as this. And we kick started them with the investment allowance, but they needed more than that, they needed co-operation. They needed to be brought together and because *One Nation* also implied bringing it together as one, we had a co-operative venture between the Government of the Northern Territory, the Government of the Commonwealth, Ministers of the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory and, of course, co-operation with the Aboriginal community of this area. With that co-operation we gave the lie to the notion that the Aboriginal people are opposed to development, that things can't be done and we have given not only birth to a new mine and to a new enterprise, but a new spirit of co-operation which will underpin the Mabo legislation and all of the other things which will follow once we recognise some of the essential truths that had to be recognised. That there was a civilisation here before European people arrived. That now, because of our High Court decision, the common law of Australia no longer comes from European custom and tradition but also Aboriginal custom and tradition and that the Commonwealth has enacted a piece of law which pulls together, understands who has this title and how it can be awarded, but in the granting of it tries to make a reparation or reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians which is honest and real.

That is why this project is going because that good will is there. And it came from the companies, it came from the governments and, I hope, one of the consequences of it is that MIM which has been at various times in recent years, in the doldrums particularly with low zinc prices, could find itself reborn as a company, as a new age Australian company, as a can do business that gets things done. Against the odds, it has been able to develop this project and I certainly pay a tribute to the company. To Bruce Vaughan - Chairman, Nick Stump - Chief Executive Office and to Peter Freund who was the ramrod on the project to get it going, that these people saw something better beyond silly factionalism and mindless politics and mean spiritedness towards the Aboriginal communities displayed by other mining companies and they actually got it up and got it running. At \$300 million a year or thereabouts, if the mine runs for 20 years we will see around \$6 billion - a very large addition

to the country's wealth and accords a large addition to its capacity to pay its way.

Let me also take this opportunity to salute the technologists because there is a new technological barrier being breached here in milling this product down to a very fine powder and then finding the extractive processes to take the silicates et cetera from it to produce the zinc. I would say to our colleagues in Japan I hope that they understand that when they deal with an Australian business, and I'm sure they do, that it is real and it will be here in five years or ten years or 15 years and that when you do business with Australia you don't wake up in the morning, some morning, to find a general in charge of the country, that it is the solid democracy, that our word matters that you can litigate your interests here in our courts and like you we are a democracy and also like you we don't have a two tiered society. We used to have the remnants of our failed upper class, they have disappeared, thankfully, into obscurity. And as a consequence, we have essentially, one group of Australians as you have one group of Japanese. I think this is an important thing, that the egalitarianism which exists in Australia also exists in Japan. This is not well understood in Australia. It is one of the reasons we do things together and we do them well. As the Ambassador and I know, all to happily, of the great partnership we now have with the Government of Japan and the people of Japan, better than a commercial partnership, a great political and human partnership which has put the war years and the rest behind us and where we are now, through APEC, building a great pacific rim community and where, I think, we enjoy a relationship of trust which our two countries have never enjoyed before and one, I think, Japan rarely enjoys with any other country in the world. This is a matter of great pleasure to us.

I'd like to say that I hope that our Japanese colleagues - Mr Kohno and Sakamoto - will find pleasure in this relationship as well as business and that we will go on to do other great things together. Because we can, I think, be relied upon. I'd like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to my colleagues, one in particular, Laurie Brereton, who I have grown up with, of course, in public life. Who pushed through all the big projects in NSW when weaker spirits wouldn't have and who took over this transport and mining responsibility from Bob Collins, who himself picked up the initial *One Nation* projects but where Laurie had this particular task as a facilitator to try to push this through as my Parliamentary Secretary. He did that, of course, with his colleague beside him from the Northern Territory, Barry Coulter, and I think Shane Stone and I here today to give evidence of that co-operation and to say how pleased we are about it.

I hope the people of the Northern Territory can understand this. That their media can communicate the fact that something good is going on here and that something valuable has happened and that it is not about petty politics and mean spiritedness or even the narrow and limited gaze of news editors. That it is something grander than all of that and that people start to understand these things.

I want to say a special word about the Borroloola Aboriginal community and their good will. To the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation (CDC) and Mawurli Corporation partners with Burns Philp in the Bing Bong Project which we have just seen and to say again this is the sort of involvement that we want to see with the Aboriginal community. Not simply royalty takers, price takers in a market, but people who are actually engaged in the business as well. Useful, responsible partners in the development of Australia. And if we have trust in them and respect for them we will see more of this. But those without faith and those without trust and those without respect will get obfuscation as they have in the past.

I'd like to say that the freehold title, I think it is Bauhinia Downs, which the Commonwealth has purchased and given to the Gurdanji people and the freehold title which will come from it pleases me enormously. I was glad that the Commonwealth could spend \$6 million diverting the road around the Borroloola Aboriginal community to make this a much more pleasant project for them. That all of these things could come together and that we could underwrite a new future of co-operation for mining and for governments and communities in this country.

This is a great continent. It is a rich continent. It is inhabited by people who believe in the human spirit and in democracy. There is no end to its wealth, to its bounty, to its abundance. We only need the sense and the good will to be able to exploit it, but to do so in a way that pays tribute to the environment. That lets people understand that the Aboriginal community were trustees of this place for 40,000 years and have now given it to another society in partnership which must have respect for the land and must understand what a great inheritance we have been given. That is why it is incumbent upon mining companies and the exploiters of the land, the pastoralists, to understand this point. I am very glad that MIM does and in the new age of mining that taking the best and leaving the rest is something that does belong to some other epoch, that doesn't belong to now.

So, respect for the environment, for the Aboriginal community, for the economic imperatives of Australia, for co-operation for the partnership with Japan, these are all the things that we celebrate today and why we are so pleased to be here for the opening of this historic project.

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