



13

## **PRIME MINISTER**

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP  
DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER FOR HUMAN SERVICES AND HEALTH,  
THE HON CARMEN LAWRENCE, MP**

**PRIME MINISTER'S EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR AWARDS, CANBERRA,  
18 OCTOBER 1995**

I am very pleased to be here today to present the Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Awards - and to recognise employers who have given job opportunities to Australians with a disability.

The Awards are in their sixth year - and in 1995 attracted almost 400 nominations.

I must say that past presentation ceremonies number amongst the most uplifting functions I have attended.

The Awards always tell a good story - and, I think, a very Australian story.

In Australia we move forward as a group. In Australia, we care about each other - we help each other out and we stick together. Australians have, I believe, a fundamental and very deeply-held belief in fairness.

There is a consensus in this country - and it's not found in all countries, or even most countries - a consensus that everyone should contribute to and share in the common wealth.

That's one of the best things about living in Australia. And it's one of the best reasons for loving Australia.

These awards are a practical expression of the Australian consensus. They are a good example of government, business and unions all pitching in and working together in the common interest.

There are many things that a government can do to create an inclusive society - and to maintain a strong social net.

Governments can provide health care and social security and education and community services to all. Not all governments do this - but the best do.

And there is much that governments can do for people with a disability.

For the past decade, this Government has assisted people with disabilities through the Disability Services Program - and in light of the Baume Report, we will redouble our efforts to increase opportunities, especially in employment, education and training.

In 1991 the Government introduced the Disability Reform Package to coordinate Commonwealth services and enable people with disabilities to participate more fully in the life of the community. The Disabilities Discrimination Act of 1993 declared that discrimination on the grounds of disability is unlawful.

These are valuable things - and the Government will keep doing them, and building on them.

But what governments cannot easily provide to people with disabilities - unlike businesses - are *jobs*.

A job is the most important element of the Australian inheritance.

It is the best guarantee of an interesting and prosperous life.

It's the best builder of confidence and self-esteem, and the best antidote for depression and self-doubt.

As a way of bringing people in from the margins of society, nothing else comes close.

Businesses should employ people with disabilities because they share - along with the rest of us - a responsibility to society.

They should do it because it will provide their employees with new skills and a better future.

But they should also do it because hiring people with disabilities is good business practice. With proper training and support and in the right job, a person with a disability can do as well as any worker. And the experience of these Awards tells us they bring an extra measure of enthusiasm and commitment to the workplace.

Of course, many businesses have already seen the light. People with disabilities are working with great flair and success in shops and offices and schools; in councils, timber companies and computer companies; in universities and banks and hotels and airlines.

And all of them are very much a part of the national enterprise.

Let me offer my congratulations to everyone involved with the Employer of the Year Awards - the organisers, the sponsors and the very hard-working selection panels.

Thank you especially to the ACTU, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Business Review Weekly.

Congratulations to those employers - in both the private and public sectors - who have given people with disabilities a chance, and who have been nominated this year.

Most importantly, congratulations to those people with a disability who take their place in Australia's work force, whose courage is equal to their employers' vision.

Australia is a stronger nation for these Awards. And because of the generosity and intelligence of the employers we recognise today, Australia is a better country in which to live.

Thank you.