



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

CAPE YORK AGREEMENT A TRIUMPH FOR RECONCILIATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Today's announcement of an historic landuse agreement on Cape York represents a watershed in the reconciliation process and a major boost for environmental protection of one of our most pristine regions.

It lays a foundation of consensus for the creation of one of the world's truly great protected areas - from the reef, through the rainforests of the wet tropics to the vast wilderness of the Cape itself.

Importantly, it points the way ahead for resolving landuse issues through negotiation and consultation, rather than by confrontation and suspicion.

It embodies within it an act of recognition by each of the parties of each other's rights and aspirations - to the land, to the environment and to economic security through ecologically sustainable development.

This is what the reconciliation process is all about. Coming together, recognising that beyond our differences we share a common purpose and a common interest in a special land, a land in which all our futures are intertwined and inseparable.

It would never have been possible without this Government's recognition of the essential truth of the Mabo judgement, without the Native Title Act - which provides for just such negotiated settlements - and the Indigenous Land Fund - and the enormous shift in attitudes that have come with these things.

When the Coalition labelled the passage of the Native Title Act "a day of shame", they forever disqualified themselves from any constructive role in a process that is fundamental to our future as a nation. They underestimated the genuine goodwill and decency of the Australians.

The rest of us have shown them that we are moving ahead - and none more so than the people of Cape York who, with a genuine sense of goodwill and common purpose, have come together to frame this agreement.

I welcome their achievement and congratulate them on it. A Labor Government will support the agreement including, subject to consensus among the interested parties in the region, the establishment of a fund to facilitate the protection of areas of high conservation value including World Heritage.

Labor's support for this agreement will bring to fruition a very longstanding and significant commitment to the protection of the North Queensland environment.

The Federal and State Labor Governments have committed \$7.65 million since 1990 to assess the environmental values of the Cape through the Cape York Land Use Strategy (CYPLUS). The agreement represents a culmination of that work and a framework within which those values can be protected.

It also builds on other significant environmental achievements of this Government in North Queensland including the protection of the rainforests of the wet tropics, and the Daintree rescue package.

I look forward to meeting with the parties at the earliest opportunity to discuss the agreement and to determine a process for co-operatively achieving their stated aspirations including the size of any conservation fund, World Heritage assessment and listing, traditional access rights and settlement of native title issues, and pastoral industry security and development.

CANBERRA
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