



PRIME MINISTER

New Year's Message

- to be released on New Year's Eve (embargoed 6am 1/1/97)

New Year's Day is one of our national days which provides a good opportunity to remember how lucky we all are to be Australians.

I have long believed that those things which we all have in common as Australians and binds our nation together are far more important and enduring than our differences, those things which push us apart. Our national traditions of tolerance, freedom, openness, democracy and a fair go, with a hint of scepticism mixed in for good measure, bind us all together. We were well served by our common values and traditions when Australia started off on the road of independent nationhood. Those same enduring values will continue to strengthen and develop our country as we move beyond the dawn of the next century.

Australians can stand proudly for our nation and our achievements, ranging from the cultural to those on the sporting field. As President Clinton remarked when he and Mrs Clinton visited us not so long ago, Australia's achievements are far out of proportion to our population. Not that we won't continue to grow and improve - we have only started to discover our

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potential. But the enduring values and traditions which make up our national psyche will help guide a future which can seem hazy and uncertain.

We are all tremendously fortunate to live in a naturally beautiful land whose natural wonders and cities and regional towns offer an enormous range of lifestyles and leisure options. We can be proud that our way is to ensure that all Australians, irrespective of their race, colour, beliefs or

country of origin, are accorded respect and dignity as individuals and are given an equal entitlement to achieve their aspirations, free from intimidation. There are regrettably few countries which can boast Australia's great record of upholding freedom of speech, religion and association.

There will always be room for us to improve ourselves and our nation - indigenous Australians come particularly to mind. But all Australians can be safe in the knowledge that we move towards the new millennium our rich traditions and common values which will continue to bind us together and keep Australia great.