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**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS TO AUSTRALIA DAY COUNCIL'S AUSTRALIA DAY LUNCHEON -
DARLING HARBOUR, SYDNEY**

E&OE.....

Mr and Mrs Unsworth, Your Excellency, Bob Carr the Premier of New South Wales and Mrs Carr, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Judith Flemming, other very distinguished guests, Ministerial and Parliamentary colleagues, Archbishop of Sydney and Cardinal Clancy and other representatives of the churches and other community organisations, ladies and gentlemen.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here today as Prime Minister to share some thoughts with you in honour of the country we all love so deeply. There are many things that can be said about politicians in all countries and one of the things that can be said about politicians wherever they come from is that they are often remembered for particular phrases that they have uttered. Some of those phrases have been carefully crafted and deliberately delivered, other phrases have been rather spontaneously generated on the spur of the moment but have lived with them forever.

I think of that very evocative phrase that one of my very distinguished and well loved predecessors Ben Chifley when he spoke of the 'light on the hill'. We remembered George Bush's reference to 'read my lips'. We remember Malcolm Fraser's immortal phrase that 'life was not meant to be easy'. I see Neville Wran is here today, I remember his remark 'are you from the ABC?'. Other phrases, of course, have been rather more deliberately cast. I'm quite certain a lot of thought was given to John Kennedy's inaugural address and to the very prophetic warning that the former British Prime Minister, Harold McMillan, delivered to the South African parliament in 1960 when it was an all white parliament and he spoke of the winds of change that were blowing with a gale force through Africa. It has been my loss, for good or ill, in the context of politicians and their phrases to be left with a phrase that I uttered when I was also being interviewed by the ABC about 12 months ago. I uttered the phrase 'relaxed and comfortable'. And I have to say that I hadn't given an enormous amount of thought over the previous couple of weeks to the use of that phrase, but I do want today to share a few words with you in explanation of that phrase and to put it in the context of what I feel about our country.

I didn't utter that phrase out of some kind of smug self satisfaction, but everything that you could possibly want about a country and everything that you could possibly wish for was there in order and everything was perfect about Australia. No society which has a proper

understanding of its history or its presence or an apprehension and belief about its future can deny certain blemishes and great historical wrongs and Australia, of course, is no exception.

But I used that phrase because of a deeply held belief I have about Australian nationalism and Australian patriotism and that is that we should not find ourselves engaged in a frantic and constant search for a new or a different identity. We should not allow ourselves to lapse into a perceptual seminar about our identity. There is a very identifiable Australian character and Australian identity. It's very different from what it was 40 or 50 years ago although there are some common threads that bind the Australian identity of today with the Australian identity of 40 or 50 years ago.

When we examine our national identity we should always remember that the symbols that we hold very dear as Australians and the beliefs that we have about what it is to be an Australian are not things that can ever be imposed from above by political leaders of any persuasion. They are not things that can be generated by self appointed, cultural elite who seek to tell us what our identity ought to be. Rather they are feelings and attitudes that grow out of the spirit of the people. I've long held the believe that those things that we hold dear as Australia, those myths if you like - those legends about Australia, are those that essentially have come in two ways. They have come out of great traumatic events such as the events of the 25th of April 1915 in the Dardenelles on the beaches of Gallipoli and there are those other things that through long usage and custom and a feeling that it suits the temperament of the Australian people we have come to love and to hold dear and I think of our tradition of informal mateship and egalitarianism. And I think it is very important when we think of our identity we remember that essentially it grows out of the spirit of the people and it is never something that can be imposed.

When I think about the Australian identity I think of many of the snapshots of my own experience as Prime Minister over the last nine months and the events that have moved me and have reminded me so forcibly of the tremendous spirit and versatility of the Australian people. All of us as a nation were moved greatly by the tragic events in Port Arthur in April of last year. The suffering of so many, the ability of the community to come together, the outpouring of national grief and a recognition that a great evil had been done and a determination to rebuild the lives of those who have been so totally shattered by those events.

I remember with great warmth and experience of the Victorian township of Benalla when that community honoured its most famous son, Weary Dunlop, the great Australian hero of World War II. The spontaneous patriotism of the young school children who sang in praise of Weary and in praise of Australian. I think recently of our great firefighters in Victoria, I think of those wonderful airman and sailors we rescued those two yachtsmen in the ferals of the Antarctic water. I think about great sports men and women at the Atlanta Olympic Games and none, of course, is finer than Nova Peris-Kneebone who we honour today. She said so very simply and so eloquently but when she put on the green and gold she played for all of us, can I return the honour and the compliment to say that we felt Nova that you were playing for all of us and we honour what you represent and we honour the tremendous achievement for you and your people.

Those snapshots ladies and gentlemen focus of course my own mind and we all have our different ways of expressing our love of country, but when I ask myself what do I love about Australia, there are many things that I love about Australia. I love Australia's tolerance and openness. I think Australia is one of the most tolerant and open societies in the world and I think the great thing that Australia can boast has been its capacity to absorb people from the four corners of the earth into a very harmonious society and over the days ahead thousands of

new people will take their oath or affirmations as Australian citizens and they will be grouping together with a common commitment to our nation but coming together from the four corners of the earth and the great capacity of Australia to absorb those people in such harmony and steadfast is I think is one of our great achievements.

I admire the adaptability of the Australian people. One of the most intriguing and endearing things about the Australian people is our voracious passion and appetite for new technology, the way in which we have taken to the communications revolution, the technological advances of the late 20th Century is a tribute to our great adaptability.

I love the surprises that you can always find about the Australian people. We are a sports loving nation and yesterday I had the immense privilege to launch the first in the Australian legends series of postage stamps which honoured the greatest living Australian Sir Donald Bradman who has straddled the generations and the hearts and minds of generations of Australians like no other person in the history of this nation has been able to do.

Yet side by side with that the young now have a growing appetite, not just the young but Australians generally have a growing appetite for the arts and the fact that there are more people who visit museums and many other artistic centres at weekends than play sport is something that a generation ago would have been a great surprise to many Australians.

I also love the scepticism and the irreverence of Australians. I spent my holidays again this year at a little haunt called Hawksnest that my family and I have been visiting for the last 17 or 18 years. I walked along the beaches as I've done over the previous 16 or 17 years, and I received plenty of advice, free advice as I walked along the beach. And it reminded me of a conversation that I'd had with President Clinton when he visited Australia last and we were talking about the things that Australians and Americans had in common and we agreed that our social informality, our scorn for class structures and the lack of formality and rigidity of older societies is something that we had in common, and he said to me, "what do you think we don't have in common, what are some of our differences?", and I offered the view that I thought Australians were a little more sceptical perhaps than Americans were and a little more irreverent and this reminded me of my most sceptical and irreverent moment in the time that I've been in politics, perhaps one or two may have heard this story before but I'll take that risk.

It was in 1983, it was just after March of 1983 and I was then a member of a former government, not a member of an incumbent government, and I'd just been defeated, and I'd been Treasurer in that Government and I didn't feel terribly popular at the time and I was invited down to Ballarat by one of my colleagues. And the tour of an iron factory was one of the events and I walked around and I tried to make conversation with the people and I got the impression that most of them hadn't really wanted me to be there and that virtually none of them had voted for my side of politics a few weeks earlier. And that message was made very clearly. And as I was walking out the door somebody came racing over and he said to me : "John, John, I've always wanted to meet you, I've always wanted to meet you, I think you were a great Treasurer". And my face started to light up and my day brightened a little. And he started to furiously shake my hand and he suddenly stopped and he looked at my hand and he said, "I know that hand, it's been in my pocket for my last five years!". I don't think you could have that exchange in any other country in the world, and I think it is one of the absolutely lovable and endearing things about living in this country and about being an Australian.

Can I say one or two rather more reverent and more serious things. Can I say not only but importantly because I am addressing you here in Sydney. I do want to take the opportunity of saying to this huge gathering particularly containing many representatives of the business community and the Sydney community generally, how very strongly committed the Federal Government is to making the Olympic Games of the Year 2000 here in Sydney an absolutely stunning success. I want to assure you that my Government will work as closely as possible with the Premier of New South Wales and the Lord Mayor of Sydney to make this a completely bipartisan Australian effort. An occasion when Australia can be showcased to the world in a way that we haven't been in the past. Not only does the Games of the Year 2000 offer us a unique opportunity of demonstrating the treasure house of talent here in Australia, but also offers up very great economic opportunities and if we are sensible as a community as a city as a nation, then we can derive enormous economic as well as cultural and sporting and other benefits from the Olympic Games of the Year 2000.

Can I also say, speaking as the Prime Minister of Australia, how important it is for the event to be seen as an honour not only just to Sydney but also for the entire nation. I look of course from time to time at the intercity and interstate rivalry for sporting events. I'm a great believer in competition cities and between states for the location of sporting events but at the end of the day what really matters to me is that the event or the occasion comes to Australia, and where it may be located in Australia is a necessity of lesser importance.

Ladies and gentlemen can I thank the New South Wales committee for the Australia Celebration for inviting me to be here and to share a few of my thoughts with you. I've been to a number of these luncheons in the past and this is the first opportunity I've had as Prime Minister to address it. I think one of the completely uncontroversial and quite unanimous things that can be said about the celebration of Australia Day is the way in which it has gathered momentum and gathered pace as the years have gone by. When I was a child going to school in Sydney in the late 1940s and early 1950s it was anniversary day, it was celebrated in a fairly desultory fashion but as the years have gone by it is a reminder of the greater passion that all of us are gathering for our national identity and our sense of being as Australians, the day has gathered a great deal more lustre, and I want to congratulate the Australia Day Committee under Barry Unsworth here in New South Wales for the outstanding job that he's done in organising this luncheon and the contribution that it is making to help all of us celebrate the miracle of being Australians.

Thank you.