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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
SPEECH TO MARION CITY COUNCIL AUSTRALIA DAY
CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY, HALLETT COVE, SOUTH
AUSTRALIA**

E & OE.....

(tape begins)

....past few days, rather as being the miracle of being an Australian. On an occasion such as this there's no shortage of words, there's no shortage of cliches, there's no shortage of rhetoric and often there's no shortage of, on occasions rather, meaningless comments about national identity. I just want to say to you that the most important things that we should think about on an occasion such as today are those things that unite us and bind us together as Australians. It's always been a strong belief of mine that the core of continued nation-building is to focus on the things that we have in common rather than the things that might divide us or might push us apart.

Everybody has their own view of what constitutes the Australian identity. That is the nature of a democracy. It is not the role of the Prime Minister, it is not the role of any self-appointed group of national identity dietitians to tell us what our national identity is. A national identity is something that belongs to the entire community. It is something that comes out of the spirit of a people. It is something that is fashioned over a period of time or fashioned or influenced by some great, traumatic or earth-shattering events in the history of a nation and that is the case with Australia as it has been with many other countries. I was reminded by the message read from Andrew Southcott that one of the great achievements of Australia is that we have been one of only eight countries that have been continuously democratic through the whole of the 20th century, and whilst it is acknowledged that many countries lost their democracy through invasion and conquest and through no fault of their own, it is a particularly meritorious achievement and something that those who would tend to denigrate the Australian achievement, those who

would see the Australian identity as being linked in part with a perpetual apology rather than a proud assertion of what this country has achieved, I think that we have been, along with only seven other nations the only group of nations to be continuously democratic through the entire 20th century, it is a tribute to the skill of those that have gone before us, it is a tribute to the special character of this country and it is a tribute to the Australian achievement.

Like any nation we have stains in our past, we have made mistakes, we have done injustices to people. Injustices and underprivilege remain in modern Australia. To pretend that everybody has a full measure of the Australian achievement is to ignore reality. To pretend that there are not things that remain to be done to generate a more secure, a more just and a more equitable Australian community is also to ignore reality. But when you assess a nation, you assess a balance sheet of its past achievements and the current state of its being and when you apply that to Australia, that balance sheet has been an extraordinarily positive one. And one of the many things that has distinguished the Australian achievement has been our remarkable openness and tolerance. No nation in the world has more successfully absorbed people from the four corners of the Earth in a more tolerant fashion than has the Australian nation and when it comes to tolerance and when it comes to willingness to accept people, this nation should bend its knee to no group of people or to no nation in asserting the tolerance and the liberties and the open heartedness and the fair mindedness of the Australian community. Our success over recent decades in particular in successfully absorbing people from the rest of the world in an atmosphere of great harmony and great openness and great tolerance is one of the proudest things we should feel on Australia Day and I for one, and I think I echo the views of millions of Australians in saying it, that that is something of which we can be assertively proud and not in any way apologetic or in any way lacking in a very strong affirmation of what Australia has achieved.

Can I say to those people who are becoming Australian citizens for the first time today, welcome, thank you for making our country yours. We welcome the contribution that you make. By becoming Australian citizens I naturally invite you to continue as I guess is the case with all of you, your very active participation in Australian and community life and as Australian citizens in the fullest sense of the word to exercise and enjoy the privileges of living in this country.

I spoke in Sydney at an Australia Day gathering of some of the characteristics that have always distinguished the Australian society and the Australian community and one of those characteristics of course has been our informality, our openness and our lack of pretension. I think there's something quite evocative and touching about having a citizenship ceremony on the edge of the water. The ocean has always played a very major part in shaping the psyche of Australia. To millions of Australians an identification with the sea, an identification with the water has been part and parcel of their upbringing, and a part and parcel of how they think of themselves as Australians. I should say, Mr Mayor, Your Worship, that having this Australian Day ceremony on the edge of the ocean, I couldn't think of a more appropriate spot. It's a reminder that we have come, we're a

nation that to a large extent is made up of people who have come across the ocean, either by ship or more recently by planes to make this their home. And of course it is also a reminder that we are as a nation an amalgamation of those who have lived here for tens and thousands of years, the original Australians, and those who have come more recently over the last two hundred years and it is also, as the General Manager pointed out, an opportunity to reflect upon the importance of a better understanding between all Australians and a determination to achieve through the remedying of disadvantage a full and complete reconciliation between all members of the Australian community.

Ladies and gentlemen, this above all is an occasion for us to forget our differences, whether they be of a political, commercial or other kind. It is not a day that belongs to the Liberal Party, the Labor Party or to any other Party. It is not a day that belongs to any particular view about how Australian society should be run within the democratic tradition. It is a day to celebrate things in common. It is a day to celebrate the unity of the Australian people. It is a day to celebrate the miracle of being an Australian and it is most importantly the day to be immensely proud of the role model of tolerance and openness that Australia represents to the world, not only now in the late 1990s but over the 200 years that have gone by since European settlement.

Thank you very much.