



PRIME MINISTER

29 January 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
LUNCHEON ADDRESS TO THE GOLDEN CITY PADDLE
STEAMER MUSEUM SOCIETY
BALLARAT, VICTORIA**

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Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank Michael very warmly for that welcome; to acknowledge Mr Jim Bell who's Chairman of the appeal; to Councillor Coghlan, the Mayor of the city of Ballarat; to Mr de Fegely, the State member, and his wife, and all the other very distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is true that over the years that I've been in politics I've come to Ballarat on numerous occasions. There's a variety of reasons for that. The local members have invited me from time to time. There was a period when I wasn't invited as regularly as I am now and I am delighted to say that the invitations have resumed. And on top of that, of course, Ballarat has always played a very special role in the recollections of anybody who's interested in the history of Australia. And I remarked at the unveiling of the bust, if you can put it that way, I remarked that as we approach the Centenary of Federation, Australians are becoming more and more interested in the history of our country. And not only at a national level, but every local community is looking back through its memorabilia and looking back through its history and getting together stories. And they're all fascinating and they've all got their share of romanticism and they all have their share of heroes.

Every community is building a history of what has gone before us. And I think one of the characteristics of the celebration of the Centenary of Federation in Australia will be quite literally an outpouring of local, historical recollection. Every community in Australia that has any kind of identity separate from the next community will be doing that. And one of the many ways in which we can celebrate the Centenary of the Federation of Australia is of course to encourage every local community to dig into its history because every local community has marvellous history. And, of course, that is what this, I feel, the Golden City Paddle Steamer appeal and this museum is all about, it's recalling and recreating the history of this district.

The paddle steamer that I travelled on was built in 1885. That's 112 years ago. There aren't many vehicles that you travel on that are 112 years old. I hope none of the planes I travel on are 112 years old! And it is really quite a thing that you can have preserved a mode of travel. You can recreate the atmosphere as best one can given the passage of more than a century. And that the driver, the Captain of the vessel - however he may choose to be described - is the Grandson of the person who built it. Now that is to you that old cliché that is living history. And the point I make, ladies and gentlemen, is that there are hundreds and thousands of stories like that in cities and in towns and in villages and hamlets all around Australia, and one of the things that I do hope we as a nation do over the next three or four years is in every part of the Australian community we gather together our historical recollections.

There are a lot of reasons why Ballarat, of course, is very much on the map when one thinks of the history of Australia. The more famous episodes are very well known in Australian history. Of course it's produced some very famous sportsmen and women, the city of Ballarat. I don't think it's produced too many rugby league players. Although I remember going to Benalla and launching the Weary Dunlop Memorial at Benalla and one thing I was very happy to remind that audience of was the fact that he was the first Victorian to ever play rugby union for Australia which was a pretty remarkable achievement and shows that, you know, there is some seepage, Michael, across the boarder. You have to bear that in mind, Gasnier is a very famous name in rugby league, Michael, a very, very famous name.

Of course, coming right up to date I was delighted to meet the Chairman of the local conservation organisation which has won the contract to operate the Green Corps which was one of the election promises that we made before the last election. And I really am delighted to acknowledge the presence of the Chairman of that organisation here today. This is an amazing organisation which acts as a facilitator between people who want to give up their time for nothing in return to care for the environment matching those with organisations that want people to provide those services. And again some pretty fierce competition the organisation, a Ballarat organisation, won from the Federal Government the contract to run the Green Corps which is going to put, initially, some two to three thousand young Australians to work on projects that involve caring for the environment. They'll receive very, very good training and also a contribution at the end of the period of their training towards their future education expenses. And the headquarters of that is going to be here in Ballarat. It's not going to be in Canberra. Although it's a volunteer organisation, in a sense it's indulged itself in, I suppose, the practises and the achievements of a small business because it's won a contract against fierce competition.

And that, of course, brings me to a brief but nonetheless heartfelt reference to something that's very important to me and very important to my Government and I know is very important to the city of Ballarat, and that is the place and the role of small business in the life of this city and in the life of so many areas of provincial Australia.

I said over a year ago during the election campaign that I regarded getting small business going in an even stronger fashion as being the long term solution, as best we

could find it and as best as a community we could find it, to the challenge of high youth unemployment. And whatever our political beliefs are, this is not a party political occasion, it's a community occasion, we have a concern about the level of youth unemployment within our society. And it's not just an economic and a political challenge but it's also a social challenge. And I do believe very sincerely that doing all we can to create more opportunities, provide more incentives, provide more encouragement and provide more support for small business will do more than any other single thing to reduce youth unemployment, not only here in Ballarat but through the whole of Australia. And so many of the initiatives of my Government have been directed towards that and I want to take the opportunity of saying what enormous importance my Government does attach to continuing to confront the challenge of high youth unemployment and continuing against the difficulties that it represents, continuing to do all we can to bring it down. It's not easy. I don't pretend to have overnight instant solutions but it does remain a very significant social as well as an economic and political challenge.

One of the characteristics that binds Australians together is the tradition of volunteer effort and the society and the organisations behind the society whose appeal I formally launched today is yet another example of how a group of volunteers in the community develop a good idea. That idea captures the imagination and the attention of the local community and for no material reward, those people like Mr Bell and all of the other people in his organisation, they set their minds to raising funds to recreate some history to provide a focal point for community activities.

And I want to encourage all of you to support the museum, to support the appeal. I am delighted to launch it. As I look around in this restaurant today I see so many aspects of the community of Ballarat represented. I see its federal and State political representatives; I see the Mayor of city of Ballarat; I see local business leaders. I had a stroll through the museum earlier and it's an attractive focal point, a reminder of the connection between the history of the city of Ballarat and the lake. I was reminded by the Mayor as we steamed through, of course, that this was the - which I had momentarily forgotten - this was the site of all the rowing events in the 1956 olympic games. I remember 1956 very well because I was doing my leaving certificate in the middle of the olympic games and it's an end of year I remember very, very vividly.

But what this luncheon represents is the beginning of a very, very important appeal to raise funds to recapture, recreate and preserve for the future a very important part of the history of a very significant part of Australia. Ballarat is not just a possession of the State of Victoria, it is a possession of the entire nation because it's inextricably bound up with the history of this country, the formation of some of the attitudes of this country, some of the myths, some of the traditions and the legends of Australia and it has a permanent and quite indelible part in place in the history of Australia and this appeal will make a very important contribution towards strengthening that place and that role and that appeal. I warmly commend it and I have very much pleasure in launching it.

Thank you.