



3 February 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
SIGNING OF REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT (RFA)
WITH PREMIER JEFF KENNETT MLA, MELBOURNE**

E & OE

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. The purpose of this news conference is for the Premier and myself along with the Victorian Minister responsible, Mrs Tehan, to announce that the Commonwealth Government and the Victorian Government have reached agreement and as testified by the Premier and I signing that agreement in a moment, the first of the Regional Forest Agreements covering the East Gippsland area of Victoria. This is the trail blazer of forest agreements around Australia.

It is a win-win agreement. It is a win for jobs in regional Australia. It will generate investment of \$150 million in the industry and the creation of 400 additional jobs, at least, in the industry. It is also a win for the preservation of environmental values because the nationally agreed criteria under the agreement have been reached or exceeded. And I want to thank the Victorian Government and particularly I want to compliment the two Ministers directly responsible at a Victorian and Commonwealth level - that's Mrs Tehan, on behalf of the Victorian Government, and Senator Robert Hill on behalf of the Federal Government.

This agreement is an example of how if you sit down in good faith and with good will you can negotiate resource security preserving environmental values. This agreement will endure for 20 years. There's provision for reviews every five years. The great thing it does is that it delivers predicability and security. It will enable people to plan, but that planning will take place in the knowledge that environmental values have been protected. So I'm delighted that the agreement has been reached and I'm delighted that I have the opportunity with the Premier of announcing that agreement today and both of us signing it on behalf of our respective governments.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION:

(Inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

(tape break)...precise break up and in a sense having entered into an agreement that protects environmental values, the important thing is that jobs in the industry generally are being created. One of the very important things we've got to understand about regional Australia is that regional Australia needs predictability and certainty and there's nothing better for regional Australian than the knowledge that you can invest in safety and that the ground rules are not going to be changed. For years and years we've had uncertainty and unpredictability in the timber industry. There's been this constant tension and tug-of-war. There was some nationally agreed criteria laid down which are world class as far as the preservation of conservation values are concerned and this agreement marries all of those things and that's why it's so good and people can now go out and invest. Small businesses, which are really the heart of much of the timber industry in regional Australia and regional Victoria, will hail this agreement and so they should because it gives them protection, predictability and certainty and that's what small business wants in Australia. And if you can give them that they'll generate the jobs that will make a contribution to reducing our unemployment level.

QUESTION:

(Inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Backlash? Well, there shouldn't be because this meets the nationally agreed criteria. I mean, if we had torn up the criteria, if we had sort of ignored the conservation values, then they'd be entitled to complain. But the benchmarks that were laid down some years ago, they have been observed.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, having promoted your Wetlands Policy yesterday ...(inaudible)...?

KENNETT:

I think that's a different issue. It has nothing to do with this at all.

PRIME MINISTER:

No it hasn't. That will be considered on a proper basis as we do all issues that affect the environment.

QUESTION:

(Inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I would say to the other States this is a trail blazer, this is a model and I would hope it will be copied all over Australia, not in every particular because...but the cooperative elements of it. If you can have a win-win in other parts of Australia, if you can get regional jobs created in other parts of Australia and conservation values protected then you've got a very good deal.

Thank you.