



13 March 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF NATIONAL
FAMILY DAY, SYDNEY**

E & OE.....

Thank you very much Mr Handbury, Mrs Zaetta, Mr Moriarty, your Grace, the Archbishop of Sydney, Dr John Yu, the Director of the Westmead Children's Hospital, my Parliamentary colleagues, Peter Collins, Kerry Chikarovski, Marlene Goldsmith, other guests and everybody, ladies and gentlemen. Can I start by congratulating Murdoch Magazines and in particular the magazine, Family Circle, for the initiative of that organisation and that magazine in sponsoring the idea of inaugurating a National Family Day in Australia.

It is a very important initiative and could I also compliment Telstra for its very heavy involvement. Of course we all understand the natural symbiosis between Telstra and teenage families. It's very powerful indeed and we're all very conscious of it and not surprisingly, you ought to keep promoting National Family Day. You ought to have several of them and then perhaps your competitors will have several of them, but seriously, it is another demonstration of another very important strand in our society and that is the greater willingness of larger business organisations to undertake a philanthropic role in our society of putting something back into a society and a community which commercially gives so much to many of our large organisations. And I do acknowledge particularly the role of Murdoch Magazines and Telstra in launching and certainly garnering the idea and launching this event which will be celebrated for the first time in October of this year.

My own views and that of my Government about the importance of the family unit within our society are very well known. Of course a commitment to the role of the family in our community is not a matter of political contention. It's one of those things that all political parties hold in common and all political parties are committed to. I think it is fair to say that the shape of families has changed dramatically over the last 40

or 50 years, particularly over the last 20 or 30. But they're important to the development of the human personality. Their value as a source, not only of emotional but also of material support has not really altered although the way in which it is expressed has changed over that period of time.

We naturally see our association and our bonds with our families in emotional, personal terms but it's also fair to say that in welfare terms, and I have frequently said this in the past and I will say it again, that a stable, functioning family represents the best social welfare safety net that mankind has ever devised and no political philosophy or no economic philosophy can replace the role of that family functioning effectively and functioning in a supportive fashion. One of the very interesting influences on the way in which the family has developed in the Australian community has been the contribution of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds to the strengthening and the development of family life in Australia. Many Australians of Asian, of Middle Eastern, of Southern European descent have brought particular strengths to the texture of Australian family life and the emphasis that so many within our community who represent those diverse backgrounds, the emphasis they place on the importance of the role of the family in Australian society is a source of very positive strengths and a source of great nourishment to the overall impact of family life within our community.

The role of the Government in relation to families of course is not a prescriptive or a determinant role. Rather it is the role of creating the circumstances of maximum choice and maximum opportunity. We have made a number of changes to areas which affect families which we believe are very beneficial. Our changes to the environment in which people work have enabled in our view, will enable in our view as the changes come into effect, will enable people to more effectively blend their work and their family responsibilities. A survey carried out several years ago directed towards Australian women produced four priority areas so far as women in Australia were concerned and the one on the top of that list was how women could more effectively combine their work and their family responsibilities and one of the values of more flexibility in workplace relations is that you do enable people to find the combination that best suits them. It's not for the Government to say that you shall work a particular period of time at a set time or week. It is rather for the Government to create an environment where you can work out with yourselves and your employer and your family to the maximum extent possible, and I emphasise that as a realistic caution, to the maximum extent possible, you work out the most effective combination of work and family responsibilities.

Another issue of course that emerges very strongly from the emphasis that we place on policies affecting the family is that we believe very strongly as a Government that the arrangements that parents make for the care of their children and the combination of full or part time parental care as distinct from paid childcare is a matter of individual choice. There is no right or wrong pattern. The pattern for a family is the pattern that best suits that family and once again, it is not the role of the Government to say which should be the predominant pattern and it is a wholly unhealthy trend for there to be a continuing debate within our community as to which is the right or the wrong way to care for young children. The right way is the way that the parents of the children decide the environment in which those children should be raised.

My Government has also placed additional resources into areas of parenting education. We've also doubled the resources available to marriage and relationship counselling, recognising in this area as in so many other areas the old maxim that prevention is better than cure is one that ought to be observed as much as possible. Our Family Tax Initiative, which commenced on the first of January gave expression to our desire to give additional tax help to families with young children within certain income ranges and so to emphasise the importance within our community of affording families the maximum amount of choice possible.

But ladies and gentlemen, at the end of the day the family unit is not a accumulation of tax benefits, an accumulation of industrial relations options or an accumulation of passionately held economic or political views. The family unit is a source of love and support, the group in our community from which most of us derived our principle source of personal satisfaction, personal happiness and personal strengths. Families come in different combinations. Not all families are happy. It's unrealistic to pretend that they are. Some families break down. The role of society ought to be comforting and assisting and also putting in place policies that minimise to the maximum extent possible the extent to which families do break down. I think it is important in our society that we emphasise in a very significant way as this National Day will, the importance of the family unit within our community. It is striking as Mr Handbury said in his introductory remarks that despite all the changes that have occurred over the last 20 or 30 years in our society and despite all of the negative talk about how deleterious are the influences of change on the family unit within our community, when you ask people what is the most important thing in their lives, most of them unerringly and quickly and without qualification say my family is the most important thing I have.

And that is a very, very signalled message. It's something that reminds us that although things have changed a great deal, there are some things that haven't changed at all and the emotional importance that we place on the family unit is one of those things that have not altered.

So may I say again in conclusion, to the Murdoch Magazines, to Telstra, and to those who have organised this little gathering and this little launch, how delighted I am to be here. The day will have the full support of my Government. I know it will have the goodwill of both sides of politics in the Australian Parliament and I wish it every great success and I know that the Australian community will recognise the importance of the occasion and give it the support that it deserves.

Thank you very much.