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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
LAUNCH OF NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST
WENTWORTH FALLS, BLUE MOUNTAINS**

E&OE.....

Thank you very much Senator Robert Hill, the Leader of the Government in the Senate, and the Minister for the Environment, to my colleagues, Kerry Bartlett and Jim Lloyd, to other distinguished guests particularly the mayor in the city of the Blue Mountains, to many in the environment and landcare movement who are here today. There is no prouder day in the history of Coalition and the environment than today.

The launch of the Natural Heritage Trust which represents the largest single capital investment in the environmental future of Australia. It is a great milestone in the hard march of the Australian community towards a greater and more broadly based recognition of the need to preserve, nurture and repair and build for the environmental future of this nation. It marks the fulfilment of a major election undertaking of the Liberal and National parties. I'm personally very proud of today because it is true that wandering around the beautiful environment of Hawksnest beach which is my regular habitat, I was certainly engrossed in developing an idea which had its fruition in the announcement that was made in the Dandenongs during the election campaign, and fittingly enough, given the proximity of the Blue Mountains to my home town of Sydney, fittingly enough it is formally launched here in this environmental hut at Wentworth falls.

Environmental protection and building for the environment is for ever a mainstream issue in Australian politics. The days when it belonged to a radical or elite or marginalised or noisy fringe minorities, those days are gone for ever. It is now something that occupies centre stage as far as the Coalition is concerned and it is something that has drawn the support of all generations. It is not just an issue in which the young are particularly concerned, although they are deeply concerned in and committed to the future of Australia's environment, but it is one that draws the interest and the concern of all sections of the Australian community and all age groups and all socio-economic groups. And it is no longer just about forests, although they remain very important, it covers the full gamut of issues that any responsible government has to deal with. Governments must now deal with air pollution, forest biodiversity, oceans, rivers, salinity and land use to name but a few and the problems are immense. Salinity and erosion are destroying productive land on the eastern and western seaboard at a growing rate. Algal blooms threaten water supplies to towns and destruction of habitats, threatens fisheries resources. The Natural Heritage Trust of Australia is a mechanism, a very substantial mechanism for attacking these problems in a concerted and effective way. It will have five independent environmental packages. They will cover vegetation, rivers, biodiversity, land, coasts and clean seas. The Natural Heritage Trust of Australia is about the shared goals of all Australians. It's about a partnership between Australians which draws together our knowledge in areas

of government, science, the rural community, environment groups and the broader Australian community.

It will of course make a very significant contribution to reducing unemployment. There are thousands of jobs involved in the spending proposals under the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia. This is not just an exercise in feel good. It is an exercise in tackling actual problems, building for the future in a sustainable way and in the process employing thousands of Australians, particularly in the rural and regional areas of Australia. So it is a positive thing for the Australian community on every score. Now, we had a bit of delay in getting it through the Senate because of the opposition of other parties of its establishment but I am very proud to announce its inauguration today.

Of course there will be many major projects funded out of the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia, and nothing of course will be more important than the clean up of the Murray-Darling basin. Of all the things that we can do for the environmental future for Australia, making a major and effective investment in repairing the problems of the Murray-Darling basin as a centenary present to the environmental future of Australia, nothing could be more important than that, and I know that that project is one that will draw the support of all governments concerned, not only my own government but also the governments of NSW, Victoria and South Australia. And I know right across the political spectrum there will be a head nod in favour of the investment that has been made out of the Natural Heritage Trust in the rebuilding of the Murray Darling basin which is so important to the productive future of Australia, so important to the agricultural future of Australia and that is the point that Robert made that we have seen a fusion of the environmental and agricultural interests. No longer do they see themselves as competitors, they see themselves as partners in building for Australia's future. It also of course is a trust which is about a number of smaller, but nonetheless important projects, and it is a downpayment as it were on the future investment of the Heritage Trust of Australia, I am announcing some expenditure of \$1.5 million today to cover such things as \$102 000 to the... inaudible... recovery plan in Western Australia, in South Australia for the Kangaroo Island Black black cockatoo recovery plan and in Tasmania the Swiss Parrot recovery plan, and also an \$800 000 to Queensland for control of rubber vine and prickly acacia as part of the national weeds strategy and we've allocated \$922 000 for aerial survey of salinity management, something that is tremendously important. The whole challenge of salinity management both in Western Australia and also on the Eastern part of our continent is going to enable us to get a better handle on the extent of the salinity problem and allow us to forecast where future problems will occur. And it's vital information in any attempt to combat salinity and I will also be announcing, conscious of where I am, I will be announcing later today special allocation for the Hawkesbury/Nepean regional strategy which is tremendously important for this particular area.

Ladies and gentlemen, they are some of the smaller but nonetheless important details of the Natural Heritage Trust but the important message out of today is that the Government has fully delivered indeed in money terms, has slightly over-delivered on the commitment that was made in the lead up to the last election campaign.

No matter what view you have about the economic management of Australia, and there is room for legitimate debate about that and I respect the range of views that exists in the Australian community, there can never be any argument that no matter

what view you have about the levels of Government spending and the size of the budget deficit and the investment here or there, there is always a strong argument for investing capital in rebuilding the natural assets of this country and the environment of course by definition is our greatest natural asset. It has been wasted, it has been degraded, it has been attacked, it has been spoilt and it has been badly neglected and that is a fault of all of us and it's a responsibility that the entire community must carry. What this Natural Heritage Trust does is to set aside a sum of \$1.25 billion to be spent prudently over a period of five years in attacking some of the problems and some of the legacies of that neglect and that natural erosion. It is very much something that builds for the future of Australia. It is something that endeavours to attack the environmental challenges of our nation in a practical, on-going, sustainable fashion.

It is not about the flashy, transient side of the environmental debate. It is very much about the patient, mature building approach to the environmental debate and if a government could hope in the years to come to leave behind a legacy of having done something really substantial it couldn't be doing anything prouder and more effective than this because we have recognised some problems. Over the years the quality of the investment that we're going to make will become more and more apparent and I think it will leave a great legacy for future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased and very proud to formally launch the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia. I want particularly to thank my colleagues, Senator Robert Hill, the Minister for the Environment and Leader of the Government in the Senate and John Anderson, the Deputy Leader of the National party and the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy. Their partnership in getting together the legislation for the Natural Heritage Trust, their partnership in making decisions about the projects which are to be funded and their partnership in symbolising the fusion of interests and the fused future of the environment and the land in Australia is something that's been a very important driving force behind this project and I warmly thank Senator Hill and I warmly thank John Anderson for the political leadership that they have given and I want to thank so many of you who have come today, some a very long distance for this little ceremony because your presence here today, so many of you holding positions of great esteem and respect in the environmental landscape here in Australia, your presence here today is very encouraging to me and very encouraging to my Government.

I feel very genuinely and very enthusiastically that we have entered a new era in the environmental saga of Australia. I feel as if we are now, we have now reached the stage where we can address ourselves in a practical way to solving some of the long term problems and the long term challenges but the area of political flashiness is smaller and the area of practical achievement is greater and I think that is enormously important for the future of this country, it's enormously important for the future particularly of the younger members of our audience and I am delighted to welcome them here today as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your presence and I have very great pleasure in declaring open, declaring the launch, declaring and finally establishing and finally arrived, the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia.

Thank you.