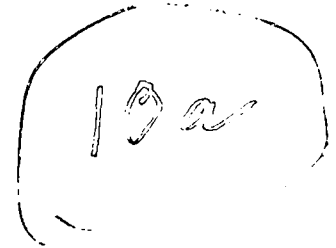


23 June 1997

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
RECEPTION TO MARK THE OPENING OF
THE AUSTRALIA CENTRE, LONDON



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Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Can I assure you Neal that I am always delighted, called upon or otherwise, to speak on behalf of all the Premiers of the Australian States.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the building that over the years has most represented the face of Australia in the United Kingdom and particularly here in London has, of course, been Australia House. It is Australia's oldest representative building anywhere in the world and I understand it is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, separate representational buildings of any nation here in London.

John Mellors spoke of his contact as a user of this building in the 1970's. I, of course, can speak of my contact as a user of the building when I belonged to that literally vast army of Australians who in the 1950s and in my case the 1960s, lived in London for up to a year while we intermittently worked and 'did Europe' and traveled around. And I first had contact with this building in the late months of 1964 when I came into the reading room to look through the Australian newspapers and to keep in touch with events back home long, of course, before I had entered Australian politics, although I must confess I was plotting something on that horizon in 1964.

The Australian High Commission in London, of course, has been the focal point of Australian representation in the United Kingdom and for a long time in Europe. Indeed, four of the first five Prime Ministers of Australia, Cook, Fisher, Reid and Bruce served as High Commissioners in London and in recent years former government Ministers - Downer, McClelland and Garland - and our own current High Commissioner, Neal Blewett. And I acknowledge the presence of Sir Victor Garland in the audience as one of the former Australian High Commissioners to London.

Certainly the London post and the representation of Australia in the United Kingdom here in Australia House has been a very very important element of the presentation and the projection of our nation abroad and I do want to take the opportunity here today on behalf of the government to thank the High Commissioner and to thank the Agents-General of the various Australian States and to thank the staff of Austrade and the other various staff of the High Commission and of the State Missions for the tremendously professional job they all do in representing the interests of our country in a collective way, here in Britain, and in a wider sense throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

The Australia Centre which I am very pleased to be at opening of today, brings together in a consolidated way the various facets of Australian representation here in London. I think it is a tribute to co-operative federalism to, you might even say, the sort of, if it's not too much of a contradiction in terms, the national globalisation of the presentation of Australia to the rest of the world that we've got all but one of the Australian States housed under the one roof and I know in time, when the vicissitudes of the property market work its way through, we'll have all of the Australian States under the one roof. I think that is something which we'll all look forward to very warmly and I do want to

make a particular point of thanking the Premier of Victoria and the Victorian government for their forbearance in relation to the joining of Victoria and Australia, which is always a source of some pleasure and always a very important event and the difficulties under which the staff of the Commission and the staff of Victoria House worked while that process was going on was something that deserves our gratitude and our respect.

I think it is terrific that we now have essentially a one stop shop for those people who want to deal with Australia, for those people who want to know about Australia and for those people who want to further their commercial and their business links with Australia through Australia House and this Australia Centre will consolidate those services in a highly efficient, a highly workable

and in every sense a highly commendable fashion.

As a nation as we move towards our 100th birthday, it is appropriate that in the oldest representational building of Australian interests abroad, a building that was opened in the dying months of World War I by King George V in August of 1918, a building that has represented the face of Australia to millions of people from Britain who have made that very very wise choice to emigrate to Australia and to become Australian citizens and never again to barrack for England in a cricket test, well, not all of them - there's a few that are still to be weeded out on that score - but it is a building that is steeped in the history of Australia's links with the United Kingdom. Its history is derived from it being - in John Mellor's case his first real contact with the consolidated Australian presence - in the contact of people like myself as visitors to this country on working holidays around the world, as housing people who have represented

the interests of Australia in Britain and Europe over a very long period time and it is therefore very important in opening this centre that I acknowledge the place of Australia House in the history of relations between our two countries.

I do want to thank the governments of the various States in Australia for their co-operative approach, I do commend very very strongly and I take this opportunity of doing so, commend very very strongly the importance of us as a nation presenting to the rest of the world a united, consolidated voice, without in any way downplaying the fact that there are immense and special regional attractions of Australia, just as there is a particular character about different parts of the United Kingdom as so many of us are so very well aware. Equally, there are in Australia but at the end of the day we represent ourselves to the rest of the world as first, second and third as Australians and the opening of the Australia Centre is a reminder of the importance of that.

It is also an opportunity for me to reaffirm the importance to my government and the importance to myself personally of the links that exist between Australia and the United Kingdom.

There are no two nations in the world whose bonds of history, whose bonds of

family to family associations, whose ties of history, whose shared values, whose shared commitment to the causes of freedom and liberty and indeed, whose shared commitment in very tragic times has been greater and more enduring than the links between our two countries and this building has served to represent Australia in the United Kingdom for a very long time and it takes a new dimension.

I have enormous pleasure in the presence of our current High Commissioner and the current British High Commissioner in Australia, Sir Roger Carrick, and I think I see the face of a former British High Commissioner, Donald Tebbitt in Australia - I think he was the first British High Commissioner that I had anything to do with when I entered Parliament in 1974 and I think it is nice that people who have had that long association with the bilateral links should be here today.

Mr High Commissioner, I thank you again for your hospitality and I have very great pleasure in