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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
SPEECH TO HERBERT ELECTORATE FUNCTION
TOWNSVILLE**

E & OE.....

Thank you very much, Peter, to Bob Carroll, the President of the Queensland Division of the Liberal Party, to my Parliamentary colleagues, particularly to Peter Lindsay and John Herron, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and to Ian MacDonald, the Senator for North Queensland.

I'm in North Queensland am I? I would never have guessed. I think it has been very good being in Townsville today and this is one of but a long series of Cabinet meetings that are going to be held in regional Australia, far away from the dogged triangle of Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.

I take it that all the television bulletins are narrowcasting tonight and none of that will get fed into my electorate in suburban Sydney, but can I say that it is very, very important and all jokes aside, it is very important that a Cabinet relates to the entire community that it represents.

When we were elected, there were many things that we vowed we would do differently from our predecessors. And one of the things that I guess we vowed we would do differently, most frequently was that we would govern for the mainstream of the Australian community and not the noisy minorities. And governing for the mainstream of the Australian community means that first and foremost you've got to go out and listen to what the mainstream of the Australian community is saying. And one of the very early decisions that we took, which is of great importance to the people of Townsville and the people of Cardwell was our absolute determination to allow the Port Hinchinbrook development to go ahead.

Now I know not everybody agrees with it, but I think most people here do, and I mean, there are a few people occasionally turn up in my electorate office in Gladesville in Sydney, it's a long way from Hinchinbrook, but they nonetheless turn up, and they make a bit of noise about it and that is fine, that is democracy and they're invited in for a cup of tea and if they behave themselves they stay and if they don't well they ...

You've got to be a little bit sort of, how shall I say, flexible but that particular decision represented a determination on our part to take decisions that generated jobs for the Australian community. And I said on ABC radio this morning that I don't think I quite used the analogy of New Zealand, they say it's the land of the long white cloud. I think Australia, when it comes to development in the past, has become the land of the perpetual inquiry and the neverending appeal. Because you never seem to end. I mean, you take a decision and then somebody pops up and objects to it and then you go to another hearing and that's overturned and then you've got to go back and you take another decision and then you have another administrative review and \$10 million later, nothing has happened.

I think one of the reasons why there was such an accumulation of hostility towards the former government before the last election, there was this sense of enormous despair that you could never get anything done in this country. You could never get a major project off the drawing board. People always thought it was a good idea but when it came to the crunch there was always some

administrative hurdle in the way. It was absolutely symbolised and epitomised and over-represented and (inaudible) to whatever you want to emphasise it by that appalling saga with the Hindmarsh Bridge in South Australia, where you had this ridiculous spectacle of the most irrational conduct imaginable from the Federal Government Minister and mind you, not much more irrational than the behaviour of the former Environmental Minister, Senator Faulkner, when it came to the Port Hinchinbrook development.

Now, I mentioned that at the outset of my remarks because one of the things I am absolutely pledged to do is to try and get the fastest, most efficient methodology to approve investment and development, in the expansion of this country that is going to create jobs, generate business and expand the living standards and horizons of the Australian people. And it remains a very, very strong determination of mine and one that is really very, very much at the top of the list and it is one of the reasons why I've appointed on to my personal staff, a very respected Australian businessman, Bob Mansfield, as a Special Projects Facilitator.

But ladies and gentlemen, governing the people of Australia, being the Prime Minister of this country, being part of the wonderful excitement, the tremendous excitement of being given the privilege of leading the government of this country, of course, represents more than just taking decisions about economic issues. It also represents defending the values and the way of life of the Australian community. And I was determined when I became Prime Minister and I recall the remarks that I made in my acceptance speech in Sydney on 2nd March 1996 that what I was absolutely determined to do, particularly when I went overseas representing Australia, was to propound and to promote the interests and the values and the concerns of the Australian community. And that is what I did on my recent trip overseas. I went overseas determined to represent the concerns of the Australian people about the greenhouse gas issue. I went overseas determined to say to the rest of the world that this was the most racially tolerant, open and cohesive society that any experience at any generation has seen.

And one of the things that annoyed me most about political debate in Australia at the present time, is the way in which so many people who comment about Australia as opposed to Australians, are spreading this view that in some way we are a narrow-minded, bigoted people. If you look at the performance of Australia in relation to other countries around the world, if you look at our track record of tolerance, if you look at the fact that after the Vietnam War this country took more Indo-Chinese refugees than any other nation on a per capita basis on earth. When you look at the way in which we have received people from all around the world, we have absorbed them into a cohesive, united, tolerant, open and liberal Australian community. I think we are entitled as other people to look in the eye and stare down our critics. We are entitled to say to the rest of the world that when it comes to racial tolerance, when it comes to an understanding of what is involved in the concept that all people are born equal and all people are entitled to equality of opportunity that there is no country in the world that can hold a candle to the Australian community.

And as an Australian, I say this to all of you as fellow Australians, I think it is time we called an end to the self-flagellation, the introspection, the defensiveness and the willingness to accept unfounded criticism, unjustified criticism of the performance of the Australian nation. We can look any people in the eye and say, we have done right by our citizens, by any measure of international behaviour and I am frankly, as Prime Minister of Australia, no longer prepared to accept unreasonable, ill founded and uninformed criticism of the tolerance credentials of the Australian community.

There are a number of other things ladies and gentlemen that I'd like to say to you tonight. I'd like to talk to you about your local Member. He's very energetic. He's very persistent, he keeps sort of, I think when he was born, his parents, and I met his wonderful parents tonight, I think instead of

uttering the first word, mum and dad, I think he said Townsville instead. He's always on about Townsville. He's always on about the interests of his electorate and that's not a bad start for a local Member and I think it's a great tribute to him that he's been such an energetic and such an enthusiastic local Member and I want to say to you that the people of Herbert are very lucky to have such an enthusiastic representative.

But making the totally unreal presumption that there may be one or two people here tonight who worked very hard to have Peter elected, could I say to you, ladies and gentlemen that on occasions like this that I come to a cocktail party sponsored by the Liberal Party, I do want to say to those of you in the audience, and I know there are many, who have stuck by us when we weren't very popular, who manned polling booths when people said the Liberal Party was going out of fashion, when people said that the Liberal Party had no hope of winning an election, when people wrote us off, when people said we'd lost elections we never deserved to win, many of you in this room tonight stuck by us. You stood there in the drizzling rain, or it doesn't drizzle so much here, it sort of seeps down, doesn't it. It drizzles a lot more where I was a couple of weekends ago. It seemed to drizzle the whole time actually. It interrupted play very frequently, I might say. Very, very inconsiderate, that's all I can say. But you really did keep the faith and you really stuck by us and one of the greatest kicks I got on election night in March of last year was being able to say at long last to the people who supported the Liberal Party through thick and thin, who put up with the ridicule, put up with the abuse, being told that our party had no hope of winning, it's terrific to stand up in front of them and say, thank you, you proved our critics wrong. And that is a matter of immense satisfaction to me and I know it's a matter of immense satisfaction to Peter and to Ian and to all of my other Parliamentary colleagues who are here tonight.

Queensland of course is a very different state. Ian MacDonald defines difference by saying it's the only state with only two Labor Members in it. That's an interesting definition of difference and I've got to say, one or two other things occurred to me but I've got to say also that Queensland delivered magnificently to us at the time of the last election and I am very, very warm towards Queensland. I am very understanding of the particular needs of the people of Queensland and some of the particular challenges of this far state. One of the things that has really excited me about my time in Townsville in the last few hours is the great enthusiasm and the optimistic and forward-looking attitude of the people who live in North Queensland. I made the observation this morning in being interviewed by, is it David Harrison?

He's got a coat on. And a tie. Anyway, well I was interviewed by him. One of the things that really struck me about the interview was the importance of focusing on the future rather than focusing on the past. So often in Australia when we talk about employment, we look at it in backward terms. We say, look, it's all gone wrong because we no longer have this or that industry. It's all gone wrong because we no longer invest in that particular area instead of understanding that to use that old sort of saying, that as one door closes another one opens and we really are as a community and as a world living on the cusp of an extraordinary opportunity.

I spent a bit of time last week in the United States and I listened to some of the explanations as to why the American economy is doing so well at the present time, although if you look at the measures of inflation and interest rates and business investment and growth, the American economy is doing no better than the Australian economy. In fact, we are about the only two economies in the world at the moment along with Luxembourg who would qualify for membership of the European monetary system. Not, might I say, have we any intention of applying to join it but it is important to understand that one of the reasons that the American economy is doing so well is that it is now beginning to enjoy the fruits of the enormous investment that that country has made in technology

and the enormous investment that that country has made in technological expansion, in modern communications technology.

When you bear in mind that as a people, Australians have always had this great love affair with new technology - you go right back to vacuum cleaners and pop up toasters and they were once new technology in the experience of many people. Australia was one of the countries that took them up quicker, at a faster rate and earlier than many other countries. We have the second highest take up of personal computers of any country in the world. It's something like 27 per hundred and only just behind that in the United States. I drew a lot of comfort from that because I think what I was being told and I think what all of us have got to understand is we shouldn't worry about trying to preserve some things that have passed before us and can't be brought back. Rather, we should be looking far more optimistically about the future.

I've got a sense that in the time that I have been in Townsville and the time that I have been in North Queensland, there is a great sort of sense of enthusiasm and optimism and I can't of course finish my remarks tonight without returning to something that is very close to my heart and that is of course the role and the importance of small business in the Australian community. I said a lot about small business in the election campaign and I said it because I believed overwhelmingly that getting small business going again was the best way that over time we could reduce unemployment in Australia but I have always believed that the key to driving the Australian economy forward in a very resolute and united fashion is giving lots of incentives and lots of encouragement to small business, and we have done a lot. We've given capital gains tax relief, starting on the first of July, only a week ago. The reductions in telephone charges are going to reduce the overheads of small businesses all across Australia. The four reductions in interest rates. The reduction in provisional tax uplift. The changes to the unfair dismissal law, the reform of the Workplace Relations Act. You add them all up and it represents a very, very impressive agenda to create better conditions and a better climate for small business but of course that as always is only the beginning and there are many other things to do.

Can I finish ladies and gentlemen, in saying that it is a great delight to be back in Townsville. It is in fact the second visit that I have paid to Townsville as Prime Minister. I came here last year and addressed a gathering for Peter and also addressed the annual conference of the Queensland National Party and I am very happy to welcome some representatives of our Coalition colleagues, the National Party, here tonight, and it's always an enormous delight to be back in North Queensland. I am going to Thursday Island tomorrow morning and I am looking forward enormously to meeting the representatives of the Torres Strait Islander people, a very impressive, dignified, separate community amongst the indigenous people of Australia for me, and I hope also for them it will be an experience that both of us can learn from and each of us can benefit from.

Again, can I commend to you your local Member, Peter Lindsay. Can I thank you very warmly for having given him a 9.9% swing on the night of the second of March 1996, and can I encourage you to build on that swing whenever the next Federal election is held.

Thank you very much.