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PRIME MINISTER

17 September 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF
SYDNEY 2000 OLYMPIC GAMES TORCH RELAY
THROUGH PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES
RAROTONGA -THE COOK ISLANDS**

E&OE.....

Mr Chairman and colleagues and other distinguished guests. You have had outlined to you by the organising committee for the 2000 Games in Sydney, the desire of that committee to have the Olympic torch carried through all of the Pacific nations that are members of the international Olympic fraternity. And I am very pleased to announce on behalf of the Australian Government, that the Australian Government will fully underwrite the cost of carrying the Olympic torch through the Pacific island nations. There are some private sector interests that I guess may be willing to become involved, and we will certainly be seeking their involvement, but whatever the outcome of that let me make it clear that it will happen - the torch will originate as tradition has it in Mount Olympus and will go to all of the Pacific island nations which are members of the international Olympic fraternity.

It will not only cement the spirit of the Olympics in the Pacific area, but it will also be a great boost to the tourist industry of this part of the world. I think the 2000 Games represent an unrivalled opportunity for all of the nations of the Pacific to boost their tourist industries. This is not just a Sydney event, it's not just an Australian event, it's also an Oceania event, it really does give our part of the world an opportunity in a very big way, once again, to emphasise its distinct character, so I'm very very happy to make that announcement and I'm delighted to be able to say that, come what may and come what private sector help there may be, that torch will go to all of the countries which are members of the Olympic fraternity in our part of the world.

While I am on my feet, could I say, as Prime Minister of Australia, that the Melbourne bid for the 2006 Commonwealth Games does have the very, very strong support of the National Government of Australia. I would have to say, if you will forgive the commercial, that the Melbourne Cricket Ground is not only the greatest sporting arena in Australia - I've been to sporting arenas all around the world and I have been to none better - not only in its capacity, but its facilities and its resources, its proximity to the city.

Ron Walker and Jeff Kennett are two very enthusiastic energetic and able advocates of the cause of Melbourne to have these games. It will be fifty years since a major event of that kind - there have been many other major events that have come to Melbourne including that one that Jim reminds me about every few days when I talk to him, that was the Bledisloe Cup, which came to Melbourne and produced in a non-rugby union city the largest rugby union crowd not only in the southern hemisphere, but I think also anywhere in the world. So I wouldn't let the opportunity go by without emphasising everything that Ron Walker and that video said to you.

I respect that there may be other bids from the region in that event, that obviously, that obviously the best will win, and I as always will feel confident to accept the outcome of the impartial judgement, but gentlemen I hope that the coming of the Olympic torch is not only a great sporting event but is a great cultural event for the nations of the Pacific region and we're delighted to underwrite its cost, and never forget Melbourne.

Thank you.