

**Address by the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, Minister for the Environment and
Water Resources
Launching *60 Years of Achievement Liberals and the Environment*
Parliament House, Canberra
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Thank you Tom Harley and thank you for inviting me here today. It's wonderful to be here with so many of my parliamentary colleagues, and of course with you Tom, and Julian Leaser your executive director.

The Menzies Research Centre is a magnificent institution and it has provided much of the cutting edge of conservative or centre-right political thinking for many years. I preceded Tom in the role as Chairman of the Menzies Research Centre. I had to step down because I was running for parliament, naturally, and I was delighted that Tom was able to take it over and then secure Julian as the executive director. And the centre has gone from strength to strength and it continues and will continue to have a very, very significant impact in the battle for ideas.

Now Tom touched on what is really the key issue or the key problem, the key mischief a lawyer would say, to be addressed by this book, which is the myth that the conservative side of politics, the Liberal side of politics, national side of politics is indifferent to the environment. It is one of the great political myths of our times and there has been this divergence or dichotomy, you can't be in favour of a strong economy and at the same time be in favour of the environment.

Let me tell you, you cannot have a successful environmental policy; you cannot spend \$20 billion on the environment; you cannot commit \$4 billion and more in this year to the environment without a strong economy and without the surpluses that sound economic management has delivered. So far from there being a conflict there is in fact a coincidence of interest; you can't do one without the other.

This of course is where there is a very significant philosophical divide between us and the left. And the best exponent of the left view of that is my opposite number, appropriately enough Peter Garrett, who only a few years ago in *The Age* said that every step forward in economic progress is marked by an increase in environmental degradation. And he's repeated that theme in different forms and different places. But that is the view of the left, that you cannot have economic progress; you cannot have a strong economy without environmental degradation.

And of course the truth is exactly the opposite. We need to have the resources to get things right. Look at the mess; look at the mess that has been created in Australia's rivers, in our freshwater systems, rivers and groundwater systems over the years by state governments it's fair to say, because it's been under their jurisdiction. Look at the Murray-Darling Basin, now we are going through the most terrible drought at the moment there, a shocking drought. Worse than the direst imagination, let me tell you.

But we know and have known for a long time that we live in a very volatile climate; we know that our environmental assets have been under stress; we know that we've needed more water to support those environmental assets. And which

government has been driving the restoration of ecological values to our fresh water systems? It has been this government, the Howard Government, over 11 years, be it the Living Murray initiative in a few years past; be it the national plan for water security today and the Commonwealth Water Act. These are revolutionary changes which will give the environment its best chance and at the same time ensure that irrigation is able to be sustainable and effective notwithstanding we have a drier and hotter climate.

So making every drop count for irrigation; ensuring that water is used most efficiently; restoring the balance between the environment and agriculture, these are policies and they are at the core of our revolutionary water policies. These are policies where economic progress, economic sustainability marches hand in hand with environmental sustainability.

Now it has been always thus. Tom ran through a number of the achievements of previous Liberal Governments and they are all outstanding. What we see in this book is that right from the very outset, right from Menzies we have a commitment to the environment in all of the policies of the Liberal led Coalition governments.

Now some may say that is perfectly natural for political conservatives and I know we throw these terms around a lot and they mean different things to different people. But let me make this observation; conservatives look to preserve the best of what we have in any sphere and seek to improve it building on the traditions of the past. But we also seek to preserve our natural environment. Conservatives are conservers, they are protectors of the environment and that track record has been so from the very foundation of our party and certainly long before environmentalism was a popular political movement.

You see a marked difference at the moment between principle and cynical politics in terms of the environment. A very good example of that is the Tasmanian pulp mill which is obviously a matter that is still being considered by me, the approval under the Federal Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act. Again, a Liberal Party initiative, that legislation, introduced during Robert Hill's tenure as Environment Minister.

There was, as you all know, for that pulp mill, an enquiry process established, the Resource Planning and Development Commission, the RPDC. And is common with these things it was dealing with both the state issues, which is the bulk of the environmental issues, and the federal issues under our legislation, matters which had the potential or were perceived to have the potential of having a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance. They were being considered together; this is called a bilateral process and it's something we do all the time to save duplication and so forth.

The Labor Government of Paul Lennon terminated that enquiry or allowed it to terminate, and then proceeded to ram through approvals for the state issues through the state parliament. So they abandoned due process. There was not one word of criticism from the Federal Labor Party, not one word of criticism from Mr Garrett, the professed defender of the environment, not one word of criticism from Mr Rudd. But

there was criticism from our side of politics and from me in particular, as the Federal Environment Minister.

And it left me in the position where I had to assess the federal environmental issues under our legislation and have proceeded to do so. And in stark contrast to the fast-tracking abandonment of due process on the part of the Tasmanian Labor Government what have we done; we've had three periods of public consultation, every relevant recommendation and report has been available on the internet, everybody can have a look at it and thousands have done so. Thirty-one thousand people have sent us submissions in the last round; thousands of people have downloaded the documents and read them and considered them. Absent in that list of downloaders was K Rudd and P Garrett, they haven't bothered to read any of this material so concerned are they for the environment of Tasmania. They haven't even turned their mind to it.

And again, in contrast to the Labor Party which abandoned an independent assessment process, I have commissioned the Chief Scientist of the Commonwealth, Dr Jim Peacock, to examine the scientific issues that pertain to the Commonwealth assessment and to provide us with his independent report on those issues, and that too will be published and that will obviously inform the decision that I take.

But there is a very practical example. You have rhetoric, environmental rhetoric from Labor and in practice they are complicit, complicit in an abandonment of due process on an important environmental issue. Whereas we on our side stick to due process, do the work thoroughly, make sure that everybody can see the information that we're receiving and review the advice we're getting, and of course get independent advice from the chief scientist.

We see the same thing too with respect to the great challenge of climate change. You know, this is an enormous environmental challenge, but we have acted and acted responsibly, whereas Labor just mouth slogans. And it is again an enormous difference.

What is the single biggest likely impact of a hotter, drier climate in Australia; unquestionably water scarcity. That is where - that will be the harshest impact. And while it is always difficult to disentangle natural climate volatility - we are the land of droughts and flooding rains after all on the one hand, and climate change on the other - we are going through very, very dry times.

Last year's inflows into the Murray were about half of the previous all time low and this year's could be no better - could even be worse. So we are going through very, very tough times and changing times.

We have acted; we have put in place for the first time an independent federal agency which will ensure that all water planning across the Murray-Darling Basin is based on sustainable principles. So this great system of rivers and groundwater systems upon which 80 per cent of our irrigation depends, will for the first time be managed as one in the national interest and managed sustainably. And who has done that? This government, the Howard Government, the Coalition Government, political conservatives, taking practical action to deal with the consequences of drought and the anticipated consequences of a hotter and drier climate.

And behind that legislation, that revolutionary legislation, we have placed \$10 billion over a decade to ensure that we get the balance right to ensure that irrigated agriculture can make every drop count, to ensure that we have sustainable agriculture and sustainable ecological systems in our rivers and groundwater systems around Australia. So that's real action.

And if you look over at climate change mitigation, we've had from this government in the course of the last year, we have seen actions which have literally changed the face of the climate change debate around the world. And I'll just mention two; I could talk about the emissions trading scheme, which will be the most comprehensive scheme of its kind in the world but I'll just talk about two particular things.

Firstly, energy efficiency, the lowest of the low hanging fruit in terms of reducing emissions. After all, the cleanest power station is the one you never have to build. Which was the first country to mandate the phase out of inefficient lighting? It was Australia governed by a conservative government, the Howard Government, our government, we've made that move to phase out incandescent lighting. And around the world now governments in other countries are copying what is called the Australian initiative on lighting. That's real leadership, leadership by example.

But perhaps even more importantly than that; consider the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions which comes from deforestation, 20 per cent at least. Many scientists think that's a conservative estimate. Ignored by Kyoto rightly or wrongly, I'm not here to chastise the Kyoto Protocol. It has many failings and the omission of forestry issues from it for all intents and purposes was a major failing.

We with our global initiative on forests and climate have put forestry issues back on top of the climate change agenda to the point where they were a key item in the Sydney Declaration which, as Tom said earlier, is the first occasion major developing countries have agreed to a global target or a global goal for greenhouse gas emission reductions.

But by putting forestry up there we are in a position now to connect through our technology, through the satellite and radar systems we and our partner countries, the Japanese, the Americans, the Brazilians, the Indonesians, through all of that we will be able for the first time to connect the billions of dollars available for CO2 abatement around the world to the practice of sustainable forestry in the developing world.

And you will have seen in the APEC week the announcement of which Alexander and I announced the deal with the Indonesians to reforest and rehabilitate hundreds of thousands of hectares of degraded land in Kalimantan with a total CO2 saving greater than Australia's annual emissions from just one project. That gives you an idea of what can be done.

Now when we announced that forestry initiative our opponents in the Labor Party dismissed it as a modest measure, a modest measure. And yet it is that leadership, it is that leadership which is with gathering momentum and support from

other countries will ensure that we are able to tackle the single biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions after the burning of fossil fuel.

On that score finally we all know that down the track, by mid-century, we'll need to be in a world where all of our electricity and most of our energy comes from zero emission sources, we know that. But take your pick with any of these targets, you won't reach any of them, unless that is your technological and industrial goal.

We know that many of those technologies are not yet commercially deployable but no country is working harder particularly in partnership with China, the fastest growing emitter, to develop the technologies to clean up coal, to capture the CO₂ and put it under the ground, to turn coal into a low emission energy source. No country is working harder than our country, than Australia. And again, that shows a commitment to the environment, a practical commitment just as Robert Menzies increased by ten-fold the funding for the CSIRO when he was prime minister, so today we have John Howard's Government leading the charge with the practical measures that both at home and abroad will secure our environment for our children and their children in the years ahead.

So thank you very much and congratulations to the MRC and to Julian and Tom and all their team for producing this terrific piece of history. I hope everyone enjoys reading it. Thank you.