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Title:

Speech at Ceremony Transferring Point Pearce Reserve to the Aboriginal Lands Trust,
Point Pearce

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SPEECH BY THE PREMIER, MR. DUNSTAN, AT CEREMONY TRANSFERRING
POINT PEARCE RESERVE TO THE ABORIGINAL LANDS TRUST, POINT PEARCE.

15.9.72

MR. HUGHES, MR. WANGANEEN, MR. KING, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

TODAY WE ARE DOING SOMETHING TO RIGHT A WRONG THAT WAS COMMITTED
SOME 136 YEARS AGO.

THE LANDING OF THE FIRST OF WAKEFIELD'S SETTLERS AND THE
PROCLAMATION OF THE COLONY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA OPENED A NEW ERA
IN THE HISTORY OF THIS LAND. BUT THERE WAS A PRICE TO BE PAID.
THE ARRIVAL OF THE COLONISTS MEANT THE DISPOSSESSION, BY FORCE
IF NECESSARY, OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO HAD DWELT UPON IT,
CARED FOR IT AND HELD IT SACRED FOR CENTURIES.

TRUE THIS WAS NOT, OFFICIALLY, THE INTENTION. THE LETTERS PATENT
UNDER THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED KINGDOM, DATED FEBRUARY 19,
1836, FIXING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PROVINCE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA,

2.

CONTAINED THIS PROVISIO:

"PROVIDED ALWAYS THAT NOTHING IN THESE OUR LETTERS PATENT
CONTAINED SHALL AFFECT OF BE CONSTRUED TO AFFECT THE RIGHTS
OF THE ABORIGINAL NATIVES OF THE SAID PROVINCE TO THE ACTUAL
OCCUPATION AND ENJOYMENT IN THEIR OWN PERSONS OR IN THE
PERSONS OF THEIR DESCENDANTS OF ANY LANDS THEREIN NOW
ACTUALLY OCCUPIED OR ENJOYED BY SUCH NATIVES."

IN FACT, SCANT ATTENTION WAS GIVEN TO THIS PROVISION. APART FROM
A VERY FEW INSTANCES ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WERE NOT GIVEN FREEHOLD
TITLE TO LAND. CERTAIN CROWN LANDS, SMALL IN EXTENT AND
INCAPABLE OF FORMING A LIVING AREA FOR AN ABORIGINAL FAMILY, WERE
RESERVED FOR THEIR USE AND THE BEST THEY COULD HOPE FOR WAS
"PROTECTION".

THIS DID NOT RESULT FROM A DELIBERATELY MALIGN POLICY OR EVIL
ADMINISTRATION. THE ETHOS OF THE TIME MADE IT VIRTUALLY INEVITABLE.

THE IMPERIAL VISION GRIPPED NINETEENTH CENTURY EUROPE TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT HAD IT NOT BEEN GOVERNOR HINDMARSH OR COLONEL LIGHT WHO LANDED, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ANOTHER GROUP, NO LESS SELF-CONFIDENT, DETERMINED OR WILLING TO BE RUTHLESS.

A MOST DISTINGUISHED SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HAS RECENTLY REMINDED US THAT ATTITUDES CAN CHANGE RADICALLY FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER. THE BELIEF THAT OUR PREDECESSORS WERE BLIND IN A PARTICULAR MATTER SHOULD NOT DETRACT FROM OUR RECOGNITION OF, OR ADMIRATION FOR, THEIR TREMENDOUS ACHIEVEMENT OVERALL. BUT NOR DOES IT FREE US OF THE OBLIGATION TO CORRECT WHAT WE BELIEVE THEY DID WRONG, JUST AS WE WOULD HOPE THAT FUTURE GENERATIONS WILL REDRESS THE ERRORS WE DO NOT EVEN REALISE WE ARE MAKING.

THE SHOCK OF EUROPEAN INVASION PAST, THE LOT OF THE ABORIGINES DID NOT IMPROVE. THE WHOLE HISTORY OF WHITE-BLACK RELATIONS SINCE SETTLEMENT HAS BEEN A SAD ONE. MARKED ON BOTH SIDES BY

MISUNDERSTANDING, ON THE WHITE BY HOSTILITY YIELDING TO CONTEMPT, INDIFFERENCE AND ONLY RECENTLY TO GUILT, AND ON THE BLACK BY BEWILDERMENT, JUSTIFIABLE RESENTMENT AND, AGAIN ONLY RECENTLY, BY PRIDE AND ANGER.

IT HAS PRODUCED MUCH MISERY, SOME ABSURD BUT DURABLE MYTHS AND VERY NEARLY THE DESTRUCTION OF A COMPLEX AND MARVELLOUS CULTURE.

CENTRAL TO THE WOES OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAVE BEEN THE ABROGATION OF THEIR LAND RIGHTS AND THE PERSISTENT THEM OF RACIALISM.

IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA THE GOVERNORS OBTAINED POWER, SOME SIMPLY BY RECOMMENDATION OF EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND OTHERS BY RESOLUTION OF BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT - TO DECLARE CROWN LANDS TO BE RESERVED FOR ABORIGINES, TO VARY THE BOUNDARIES OF RESERVES, TO ABOLISH THEM ALTOGETHER OR TO PRESCRIBE CONDITIONS FOR THEM.

VERY LITTLE LAND WAS ACTUALLY SET ASIDE. IT IS ONLY IN COMPARATIVELY RECENT TIMES THAT LARGE AREAS, SUCH AS YATALA AND THE NORTH WEST RESERVE WERE ESTABLISHED.

THE BRUTAL FACT IS THAT UNTIL VERY RECENTLY THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF THIS STATE HAD NO LAND RIGHTS COMPARABLE WITH THOSE GRANTED TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN OTHER COUNTRIES, DESPITE THE OFFICIALLY GOOD INTENTIONS OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE PROVINCE. AND THIS STILL APPLIES ELSEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA - A SITUATION WHICH IS LITTLE SHORT OF A NATIONAL SCANDAL.

IT WAS IN 1966 THAT THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DETERMINED THAT IT WOULD GIVE THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FULL TITLE TO EXISTING LANDS AND, WHERE POSSIBLE, TITLE TO ADDITIONAL LAND AS A MEASURE OF COMPENSATION FOR THE FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE LETTERS PATENT.

THIS RESULTED IN THE CREATION OF THE ABORIGINAL LANDS TRUST - THE FIRST, AND REGRETTABLY STILL THE ONLY, SUCH BODY IN AUSTRALIA - AND TO THE PRESENCE OF MR. HUGHES AND MYSELF ON THIS PLATFORM TODAY.

AN IMPORTANT PROVISION OF THE LANDS TRUST ACT IS THAT BEFORE THE TRUST CAN TAKE OVER RESPONSIBILITY FOR INHABITED ABORIGINAL LAND, THE PEOPLE THERE MUST CONSENT TO IT THROUGH A PROPERLY REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL. POINT PEARCE IS THE FIRST RESERVE TO OPT FOR ADMINISTRATION BY THE TRUST - A DECISION WHICH I KNOW THE PEOPLE HERE WILL NOT REGRET. I LOOK FORWARD TO THE TIME, AND I DON'T THINK IT IS FAR OFF, WHEN OTHER AREAS WILL DECIDE TO FOLLOW SUIT AND, IN THE LONGER TERM, TO THE DAY WHEN ALL RESERVES WILL BE HELD FREEHOLD BY THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF THIS STATE AND VESTED IN THE TRUST TO BE RUN BY THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THEMSELVES SOLELY FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT.

7.

THE WAY IN WHICH THE TRUST HAS APPROACHED THE ADMINISTRATION OF POINT PEARCE SINCE THE ADMINISTRATIVE HAND-OVER IS MOST IMPRESSIVE AND A VERY PRACTICAL TESTIMONIAL FOR THE PEOPLE ON OTHER RESERVES OF THE MERIT OF SWITCHING FROM DEPARTMENTAL TO TRUST ADMINISTRATION. I AM SURE THAN UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE COUNCIL HERE AND THE TRUST, POINT PEARCE WILL DEVELOP AS A THRIVING FARMING COMMUNITY. WITH THE ADDITION NOW OF WARDANG ISLAND AND ITS DEVELOPMENT AS A TOURIST RESORT WE CAN CONFIDENTLY PREDICT THAT IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE POINT PEARCE BECOMES A SHOWCASE FOR AUSTRALIA OF ABORIGINAL ENTERPRISE.

SURVEYS HAVE DEMONSTRATED ALREADY THAT POINT PEARCE IS A VIABLE BUSINESS ENTERPRISE AS WELL AS A PLEASANT COMMUNITY. CONSULTANTS ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN AN INTENSIVE STUDY OF THE WARDANG ISLAND PROJECT - UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE TRUST - TO ENSURE THAT IT, TOO, IS DEVELOPED ON SOUND BUSINESS LINES.

8.

THE PASSING OF THE LANDS TRUST ACT WAS A LANDMARK IN THE HISTORY OF RACE RELATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY AND IT IS A MATTER OF GREAT PRIDE TO ME TO HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH IT. BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, A CHANGE IN THE LAND TITLE SITUATION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, EVEN ONE AS PROFOUNDLY IMPORTANT AS THAT, CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO SOLVE ALL THE DIFFICULTIES CONFRONTING THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

WE NEED ACTION ACROSS AUSTRALIA TO PROTECT THE LAND RIGHTS OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. THE PRESENT SITUATION IN WHICH THE FORTUNES OF A MINING COMPANY ARE DEEMED TO BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE HERITAGE OF A PEOPLE IS AN AFFRONT TO DECENT MEN AND A STAIN ON OUR SOCIETY. ACTION IS NEEDED MOST URGENTLY AT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL. IT IS NO USE SWEEPING THE PROBLEM UNDER THE CARPET, OR TOSSING IT OFF THE LAWNS OF PARLIAMENT HOUSE IN CANBERRA.

WE NEED, TOO, A REVOLUTION IN ATTITUDES.

FOR TOO LONG, AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN TAINTED WITH THE SLUR OF RACIALISM. WE CAN'T HIDE THAT EITHER. TO MY MIND THERE IS NO GREATER EVIL IN THE WORLD TODAY THAN RACIALISM; IN ANY FORM IT IS ODIOS AND DETESTABLE, WHETHER IT OCCURS IN MR. VORSTER'S SOUTH AFRICA OR GENERAL AMIN'S UGANDA. WE AS A NATION SHOULD PUBLICLY CONDEMN RACIALISM WHEREVER WE FIND IT BUT - IF ANYONE IS TO HEED US - OUR OWN HOUSE MUST BE IN ORDER. IN ANY OF THE RECURRENT NATIONAL DEBATES ABOUT IMMIGRATION GREAT STRESS IS ALWAYS LAID ON THE PHRASE "A HOMOGENEOUS SOCIETY". NOW, AND LET ME STATE THIS EMPHATICALLY, I THINK WE NEED THE MOST CAREFUL CONTROL AND SCRUTINY OF ANY MIGRANT INTAKE TO OUR SHORES. BUT IT IS TERRIBLY REVEALING OF SOME AUSTRALIANS' ATTITUDES TO TALK ABOUT A HOMOGENEOUS SOCIETY WHEN THE FACT IS - PLAIN FOR ALL TO SEE - THAT FROM THE DISEMBARKATION OF THE FIRST FLEET THIS HAS BEEN - AND REMAINS - A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY. AND IN SUCH A SOCIETY BLACK AND WHITE MUST HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS TO DIGNITY AND JUSTICE.

I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE LEGISLATION - SIMILAR TO THAT WE HAVE ADOPTED - PROHIBITTING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION EVERYWHERE IN AUSTRALIA. MORE IMPORTANTLY, I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE A PROPER RECOGNITION BY EUROPEAN AUSTRALIANS OF THE ABORIGINAL TRADITION AND ACCOMPLISHMENT.

THE JOB OF GOVERNMENTS, AS I SEE IT, IS TO PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE CAN MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICE OF LIFE-STYLE AS CO-EQUAL AUSTRALIANS. IT IS FOR YOU TO DECIDE WHETHER YOU WISH TO LIVE IN A CITY OR ON A RESERVE. OUR JOB IS SIMPLY TO PROVIDE THE OPTIONS, NOT ARROGANTLY TO TRY AND RESHAPE PEOPLE.

AN ENGLISH PRIME MINISTER, WILLIAM PITT, ONCE SAID:

"THE POOREST MAN MAY IN HIS COTTAGE BID DEFIANCE TO ALL THE FORCE OF THE CROWN. IT MAY BE FRAIL; ITS ROOF MAY SHAKE; THE WIND MAY BLOW THROUGH IT; THE STORMS MAY ENTER; THE RAIN MAY ENTER. BUT THE KING OF ENGLAND CANNOT ENTER. ALL HIS FORCES DARE NOT CROSS THE THRESHHOLD OF THE RUINED TENEMENT."

THAT IS A RATHER ROSY VIEW OF THE RIGHTS OF ANY CITIZEN. BUT WILLIAM PITT DESCRIBED THE KIND OF AUTONOMY WE WISH TO CONFER ON THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF THIS STATE ON THEIR OWN LANDS.

IT IS WITH PRIDE AND PLEASURE, THEREFORE, MR. HUGHES, THAT I NOW FORMALLY HAND OVER TO YOU, THE TRUST AND THE RESIDENTS OF POINT PEARCE, OWNERSHIP IN PERPETUITY OF THIS LAND.

THANK YOU.