



**ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE QUENTIN BRYCE AC CVO
GOVERNER-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE
FORTY-FOURTH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT**

**PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
TUESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2013**

Introduction

Honourable Senators and Members of the Parliament of Australia.

Today, at the opening of the 44th Commonwealth Parliament, we celebrate the enduring health of our democracy.

One hundred and twelve years after the first Federal election, nearly 14 million Australians have cast their votes in another free and fair election.

For only the fourth time in three decades, the Australian people have voted for a change of government.

The people have set a new course for our country. On September 7, the Australian people voted for a government that said it would repeal the Carbon Tax, establish a Commission of Audit and improve the Budget, strengthen border protection and build the roads of the 21st century. My Government will honour the will of the people and repay their trust.

Members of the new Government take office with a deep sense of humility for the honour conferred upon them. Today and every day, my Government will work to deliver the commitments it made to the Australian people.

My Government has a clear and comprehensive plan of action for building a stronger Australia. It will be a purposeful government. Every day it will work in a way that is careful, collegial, consultative and straightforward because this is the best way of delivering the better government that the Australian people want.

At the heart of my Government's plan for Australia is a strong, prosperous economy. A strong and prosperous economy, built on strong, prudent economic management, is the basis for realising every other national goal.

My Government's plan for a stronger Australia begins with building a more productive and diverse economy that will guarantee Australia's future prosperity by building on our national strengths.

It will strengthen the economy through lower taxes, less regulatory burdens and higher productivity.

It will work to deliver more jobs and more opportunity – so there is less pressure on families and so that more Australians can get ahead.

It understands that the foundations of a strong economy are found in policies which reward hard work and individual effort and which encourage personal aspiration and ambition.

We should never be a country that seeks to cut ‘tall poppies’ down to size, but one where everyone is encouraged to grow and succeed. Australia needs more successful people and we should give our people every opportunity to succeed.

My Government’s vision is not of bigger government but of stronger people. It is a vision of a dynamic, confident Australia – where all 23 million of us can individually and together pursue our hopes and dreams.

Cutting Taxes

The repeal of the Carbon Tax and Mining Tax are at the heart of my Government’s plan to strengthen the Australian economy.

As its first order of business, this Parliament will consider legislation to repeal the Carbon Tax.

My Government believes the Carbon Tax is a burden on every Australian business and it is a burden on families.

As part of my Government’s commitment to families, it will repeal the Carbon Tax – but will keep the current tax thresholds and fortnightly pension and benefit levels – ensuring real assistance to families.

The repeal of the Carbon Tax will enhance the competitiveness of both big business and small.

As well, legislation to abolish the Mining Tax will be before Parliament this year.

The end of the Carbon Tax and Mining Tax will be a clear message that Australia is ‘open for business’.

My Government is determined to re-energise the resources industry and to create more jobs in more projects, through restoring Australia’s reputation as a good place to invest.

Australia's mineral wealth is one of our great national gifts and all Australians will benefit from a bigger and stronger mining industry and more certain investment settings.

The Government will cut the company tax rate by 1.5 per cent from 1 July 2015. The new company tax rate of 28.5 per cent will benefit all Australians. As the Henry Tax Review noted, a lower company tax rate "will not only result in higher growth but is also likely to result in higher wages".

My Government has already determined that it is not proceeding with changes to FBT arrangements for leased vehicles – and this will provide all parts of the car industry across Australia with certainty and confidence.

Role of Government

My Government understands that taxpayer money is best spent on delivering better services and a better society – not on interest repayments that come from spending more than you have.

It also understands that every dollar it spends is a dollar that has been earned by someone else. As such, government has a duty to ensure that every dollar is used prudently and wisely.

A Commission of Audit has been established that will identify waste and duplication and provide taxpayers with better value for money. It is the first such audit in nearly two decades.

Its focus will be on making public administration more cost effective and more productive through reducing duplication and overlap between governments.

Honourable Senators and Members.

This will be an active government, not a big government.

It aims to strengthen the economy, improve the budgetary position and lay out a plan for long-term sustainable growth.

By strengthening the economy, we strengthen Australia.

Small Business and Deregulation

Employing almost one in two people in the private sector, small businesses are the best job creators in the Australian economy.

My Government will lower taxes, cut red tape and make it easier for small businesses to grow and employ more people.

For the first time in two decades, there will be a root and branch review of national competition policy – because competition drives productivity growth.

The company tax cut will reward those who have the courage and resourcefulness to start and grow their own business.

My Government will lighten the red tape burden because too many businesses spend too much time meeting a seemingly ever-expanding list of regulatory requirements.

My Government intends to cut red tape costs on businesses and community groups by \$1 billion a year.

And reduce green tape by creating a State-based one-stop shop to streamline the environmental approvals process.

As part of the Government's plan to boost productivity and reduce regulation, every significant Commonwealth Government department and agency will be given an annual target for red tape cost reductions. Meeting these targets will be essential criteria by which departmental secretaries and senior public servants are assessed.

And for two sitting days each year, this Parliament will meet to review a Deregulation Report and repeal redundant legislation and regulation.

Employment and Welfare

As part of its commitment to boost productivity, the Australian Building and Construction Commission will be restored to ensure that on commercial building sites, the rule of law is respected, productivity is improved, jobs are created and major national construction projects are kept on track.

The law will be changed so that registered organisations and their officials are held to the same rules and standards as companies and their directors.

My Government believes in the dignity of work and the importance of participation, so it will reinvigorate the Work for the Dole programme to help ensure that all working age people are working – preferably for a wage but, if not, through the Work for the Dole programme.

There will be incentives for employers to take on more mature aged workers and young people. These incentives include a Job Commitment Bonus for long-term unemployed people who get work and remain off welfare for 12 months, with an increased bonus at 24 months – and a new Jobseeker Relocation Bonus for young people who move to take up work.

Workforce Participation

More accessible, affordable and flexible child care is good for the economy as well as good for families.

Improving access to child care provides parents with more choice, the workforce with more workers, and lifts the productivity of the nation.

My Government is tasking the Productivity Commission to undertake an inquiry into child care. The Productivity Commission will identify how the current system can be improved and how it can be made more responsive to the needs of parents.

My Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme, starting on 1 July 2015, is also part of its plan for delivering a stronger economy through improved workforce participation.

The new scheme will pay women at the rate of their actual wage – rather than the minimum wage – and for 26 weeks rather than 18 weeks under the current scheme.

Currently, of the more than 30 countries in the OECD offering a paid parental leave scheme, Australia is one of only two that fail to pay parental leave based on a replacement wage.

The new scheme will provide a woman earning an average full-time salary with \$21,300 more than the current scheme.

Paid Parental Leave should be a workplace entitlement, not a welfare payment.

Above all, it gives working women the support they need to balance the competing responsibilities of career and family.

Jobs Target

By growing the economy, we can create the best conditions for more jobs, higher wages and the funding of better services for all Australians.

This will provide benefits for all parts of the economy – in manufacturing, agriculture, education and research, and services, as well as mining.

Within five years, my Government envisages that our economy will have delivered one million new jobs.

And within a decade, over two million new jobs will have been created.

Asia and the Region

As well as playing its part in the wider global community, my Government will strengthen Australia's relations with key partners and will bring a 'Jakarta, not Geneva' focus to our foreign policy. The focus of our international policies will be on the advancement of Australia's core strategic and economic interests.

Australia has global interests but it is particularly important that we focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

As the economies of Asia continue to expand, demand for Australian minerals and other exports will remain strong.

And as the Asian middle class grows and demographics shift, there will be new demand for Australian education and research, expertise in advanced services, manufacturing and agricultural products.

To make sure this moment is not missed, my Government will fast-track Free Trade Agreements with South Korea, Japan, China, Indonesia and India.

These are agreements that will provide new and enlarged markets for Australia's high-quality products and services – which means more exports and more jobs for Australians.

Australia needs to be Asia-literate and Asia-capable.

My Government will work to develop stronger people-to-people links and to foster the culture and mindset necessary to capitalise on Asia's historic economic transformation.

Academic and cultural exchanges are crucial to building this kind of network, so the Government will implement a new, two-way version of the former 'Colombo Plan' that will encourage more young Australians to study in the universities of Asia, as well as bringing students from our region to Australia's universities.

A revitalised, competitive, productive and Asia-ready economy is the beginning, not the end, of my Government's vision for Australia.

Rural and Regional Australia

Northern Australia is Australia's growth frontier.

If we prepare ourselves well, our cities and industries in the North will be well-placed to capitalise on the expected growth from the Asia and Pacific regions.

Unlocking Northern Australia's potential with more investment, more exports and more jobs will not only benefit the region, but the entire country.

Over the next 12 months, my Government will develop a White Paper to guide the policies and plans that will unlock the full economic potential of the North.

A strong and competitive agriculture sector is essential to Australia's future.

To support this aim, \$100 million will be invested in agricultural research and development, with a focus on improving productivity.

And within the next 12 months, a White Paper focused on the profitability and competitiveness of the agriculture sector will be developed.

Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania

While the Government's plans to lower taxes, cut red tape and lift productivity will benefit all Australians, my Government also recognises that parts of Australia are under sustained economic pressure.

In particular, my Government is determined to restore confidence and jobs growth in Tasmania and change the economic trajectory of that State.

The Government will implement an Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania to reset Tasmania's course to one of higher growth, more jobs and rising living standards.

The Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania includes establishing a Joint Commonwealth and Tasmanian Economic Council as well as a Major Projects Approval Agency which will be a one-stop shop for all projects valued at over \$50 million.

Roads of the 21st Century

Working with the States, my Government will build the roads of the 21st century, with cranes over our cities and bulldozers on the ground.

The WestConnex and the F3 to M2 upgrade in Sydney;

The East West Link in Melbourne;

The Gateway Motorway upgrade in Brisbane;

The North-South Road corridor in Adelaide;

The Perth Gateway project and Swan Valley Bypass; and

The Midland Highway in Tasmania.

As well as completing the duplication of New South Wales' Pacific Highway and upgrading and flood-proofing of Queensland's Bruce Highway.

Better major roads and less congestion will allow Australians to spend less time stuck in traffic and more time at home with their families.

There will be better infrastructure planning and more rigorous and transparent assessments of taxpayer funded projects.

There will be a decision on a second major airport for Sydney.

In collaboration with the States and Territories, there will be a rolling 15-year infrastructure plan that identifies funding priorities on the basis of published cost-benefit analysis.

For the first time, there will be an annual statement to the House of Representatives on the construction status of major infrastructure projects, the amount of Commonwealth funds spent on them and whether milestones have been met.

Broadband

The modern, connected economy has made broadband an essential strand of 21st century infrastructure.

My Government will deliver the fast and affordable broadband that Australians need and have been calling for.

Australians' expectation of faster broadband has not been met. A new model for the National Broadband Network is needed if the fast and affordable broadband that Australians want is actually to be delivered.

My Government will build fibre to tens of thousands of distribution points – not to 12 million premises – and then use existing infrastructure to deliver much faster broadband to Australian homes.

A ranking of broadband quality and availability in Australia will be provided to Parliament to guide prioritisation of the rollout.

NBN Co will be required to amend its rollout plan so that priority can be given to the areas identified as inadequately served.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

My Government will make the National Disability Insurance Scheme a reality for Australians with disabilities and their carers.

It is a vast undertaking almost without precedent in our national life.

My Government will continue the rollout of the NDIS in line with the Productivity Commission's vision and the timetable detailed by the inter-governmental agreements with the States and Territories.

Delivering the right support for people with disabilities and their carers is a bipartisan project.

So a bipartisan joint parliamentary committee will make sure the NDIS is kept on track.

Hospitals

To improve the performance of public hospitals, my Government will work with the States and Territories to give communities a real say in the management of their local hospitals.

This approach should instil a 'patients-come-first' culture and deliver better outcomes at a local level. It will put more control into the hands of local hospital administrators and local doctors and nurses, ensuring better decisions are made.

My Government will continue to support the rollout of Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centres and will establish Australia's first National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health.

My Government is committed to providing transparency, certainty and confidence to the listing of medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

It will take steps to ensure that medicines are listed on the advice of the independent Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, ensuring that decisions made are based on the advice of medical experts.

To continue the tradition of great Australian medical breakthroughs, my Government will provide \$200 million to help Australian scientists find a cure for dementia.

The Government will also provide \$35 million to help find a cure for Type 1 diabetes. This funding will help the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to fund patient trials and co-ordinate a nationwide approach to diabetes research.

Education

As with public hospitals, my Government wants to lift the quality of State schools by giving parents, principals and school communities more of a say in how their school is run.

My Government will work co-operatively with the States and encourage them to give schools greater independence through simpler budgeting and resource allocation and more autonomy in decision-making.

In the classroom, my Government's vision is for a national curriculum that is rigorous and challenging without being cluttered or prescriptive.

We also must make a concerted effort to get the basics right to ensure that all children leave school with strong literacy and numeracy skills.

To inspire the next generation of Australian innovators and inventors, the Primary Connections science education programme will continue.

And because every Australian student has the right to a safe and happy school day, my Government will work with social media operators, schools and parent groups to tackle cyberbullying and other harmful online material directed at children.

Older Australians

Older Australians deserve peace of mind, certainty and confidence.

During this Parliament, there will be no negative, unexpected changes to the superannuation system – so that Australians planning for their retirement can face the future with confidence.

We will provide fairness in superannuation pensions to our veterans. The Defence Force Retirement Benefit and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefit superannuation pensions will be more generously indexed from 1 July next year.

A first ever Aged Care Provider Agreement will set a new framework for ageing policy and aged care arrangements into the future – reducing bureaucracy and keeping the focus on quality care.

A More Secure Nation

Providing national security is the first duty of every government.

To rebuild the Australian Defence Force, my Government will restore defence spending to two per cent of GDP within a decade.

A new defence White Paper will identify costed, affordable ways to meet Australia's national security objectives.

And responsible savings found in the defence bureaucracy will be reinvested in greater military capacity.

2014 marks the commencement of the Centenary of ANZAC. It is my Government's hope that every Australian will be involved in some way in the commemorations that will take place in coming years. It will be a time to reflect on our history and renew our commitment to our country.

Stronger Borders

Honourable Senators and Members,

The Government will strengthen Australia's borders and stop the flow of illegal arrivals.

My Government has reintroduced Temporary Protection Visas – to deny the people-smugglers a product to sell.

Operation Sovereign Borders has already commenced to combat people smuggling and protect our borders.

A presumption against refugee status will apply to those who arrive without papers and those who deliberately discard their documentation will be denied the benefit of the doubt when determining their refugee status.

Priority will be given to offshore Refugee and Special Humanitarian visa applicants over those who arrive by boat.

My Government is putting in place a Regional Deterrence Framework with our partners to strengthen our region's borders and thereby strengthen Australia's borders.

Border Protection Command has been tasked to deploy the full set of measures necessary to ensure the integrity of our maritime borders and protect Australia's sovereignty.

All of this will occur in consultation with our friends and neighbours in the region.

Environmental Priorities

The Government will take direct action to reach its goal of a five per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2020.

My Government will establish an Emissions Reduction Fund, capped at \$1.55 billion over the forward estimates.

A cleaner environment helps all Australians – now and into the future. However, the best actions are practical and direct ones to improve our rivers, soils, air and farms. This can be done without a carbon tax or an emissions trading scheme.

There will be a 15,000 strong Green Army charged with clean-up and conservation in local communities throughout Australia.

The Green Army will supplement the land care efforts of councils, farmers and volunteers and work to rejuvenate our parklands and the bush.

Indigenous Australians

Honourable Senators and Members.

Empowered communities are far more important than an empowered government.

Nowhere is the truth of this more apparent than in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

My Government wants a new engagement with Aboriginal people to be one of its hallmarks.

The Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, chaired by Mr Warren Mundine, has been established.

The Council's focus will be ensuring that children go to schools, adults go to work and the ordinary rule of the land operates in Aboriginal communities.

'Training for training's sake' programmes will be replaced with initiatives that help Indigenous Australians find, and keep, meaningful and rewarding work.

In cooperation with the Australian Employment Covenant and Generation One, \$45 million will train 5,000 Indigenous people for guaranteed jobs – because a real job offers dignity and hope, and is a critical part of our Reconciliation journey.

A new concerted emphasis on attending school and finding work can break the cycle of welfare dependency and the entrenched unemployment that has held back Indigenous Australians for too long.

Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous People

Within 12 months, my Government will put forward for public consultation a draft constitutional amendment to recognise Indigenous people in the Constitution and establish a bipartisan process to assess its chances of success.

A referendum recognising Aboriginal people as the first Australians could be a unifying and liberating moment for the nation, even surpassing the 1967 change or the National Apology.

Such an acknowledgement of Aboriginal people as the first Australians would complete our Constitution rather than change it.

Conclusion

There will be more for this Parliament to do.

New challenges will arise, new problems will need to be solved.

But my Government begins its time in office with a sense of optimism.

There is no limit to what Australia can achieve, but only if we respect the limits of government, as well as its potential.

Over the next three years, my Government aims to provide mature and stable leadership that matches words with deeds.

Leadership that puts its faith in Australia's greatest resource — the genius and creativity of our people.

Honourable Senators and Members.

At the Opening of the first Parliament in Canberra in 1927, the Duke of York said that a new Parliament marked a new page of history. He said that the Opening of the Australian Parliament was an opportunity for the re-dedication of this Commonwealth to the great ideals of liberty, fairness, justice and the cause of peace.

Today, with a new Parliament, a page has turned. A new page in our country's history is about to be written.

May we all play our part in writing that shared history and building the stronger Australia that we all want.

It is now my duty, and pleasure, to declare the 44th Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia open.