



PRIME MINISTER

17 January 2004

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE ADELAIDE TO
DARWIN RAILWAY
PORT OF DARWIN, DARWIN**

E&OE.....

Well firstly could I acknowledge the Larrakeyah people, the traditional owners of this land, the Administrator, Premier, Chief Minister, David Lesar, Rick Allert, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

This is a great moment in the history of Australia, it's not just a great moment, important though it is in the history and the development of the Northern Territory, fulfilling an aspiration of course that you've heard so much about, born almost 100 years ago, but to the entire nation this is a reminder of Australia at its best. What has been brought to fruition today reminds all of us that if we persist, if we work together, if we keep our gaze fixed on a goal, there is absolutely nothing that Australians working together cannot achieve.

It's one of those moments that brings together both the history of this country, but also a very clear eyed understanding of our future. The history over 100 years of the various attempts to build this railway have been very well documented and the debates of almost 100 years ago have been trawled through in minute detail by my two parliamentary colleagues and many others as they've come from Adelaide to us here in Darwin. And it is steeped in history and in a way you can see it symbolically as conquering that last element of the tyranny of distance, as Geoffrey Blainey put it, that always afflicted Australia. So it has got a lot to do with our history but it's also got very much to do with our future, because one of the great hopes of this railway is that it will further cement the role and the place of Darwin as a great port and a great bridge and a great link with the associations, economic and otherwise, that Australia has with the nations of Asia and it is therefore in that way very much part of our future and very much bound up with the links between Australia and the nations of our region.

It is important, ladies and gentlemen, on an occasion such as this to pay tribute to so many who've done so much to bring this about. I share the compliment paid by Rick Allert to Barry Coulter for the enormous energy that he displayed, his persistence dealing with people, the same people often in both government and opposition, at a federal level. I compliment the work of previous chief ministers of the Territory, and previous premiers of South Australia.

It was Dean Brown and Shane Stone who first came to me after I become Prime Minister to reinforce the joint support of the people of South Australia and the people of the Northern Territory for this project, and I compliment the current occupants of this two positions, Clare Martin and Mike Rann, on the persistence and commitment that both of them have displayed towards it. And may I say that I'm quietly very proud of the fact that I lead the national government that ultimately gave the decisive financial support at a federal level that made the project possible.

But the most important people in building the railway were those who constructed it and those who conceived it, the private sector people who organised the finance, and I pay particular tribute to Malcolm Kinnaird and Rick Allert, the two businessmen with which I've had the most association in the course of putting the railway together, to David Lesar, but finally and most importantly to the men and women of the Territory and other parts of Australia who worked on the railway, who finished it ahead of time, who finished it efficiently and made it what it is and that is a great tribute to Australian engineering skill and a great tribute to the capacity of the Australian people to conquer any obstacle and clear any hurdle if we work together and commit our collective wills to those goals.

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