

Transcript of speech made by
Peter Garrett, MP
Manly Environment Centre 15th Birthday Celebration
23rd March 2006

Thanks very much Mayor, Peter Macdonald, Judy, all those guests, old neighbours of mine. I can see a few old surfing buddies around the place. It's a real pleasure for me to be able to come back on this 15th birthday of Manly Environment Centre.

I'm a little bit out of my range here, my responsibilities now are for reconciliation and arts in the Federal Parliament, so it has to be something pretty important to get me outside a portfolio, but this certainly is a good reason to come down.

When I was first present at the launch of the Manly Environment Centre some 15 years ago, I had no idea that it would turn into such a positive institution, which can hang in through sometimes choppy water and then onto smooth seas, but also do good work. And I think the important thing about the Environment Centre is that it came out of community, it came out of people who, in this part of the world, stood up a number of years ago and a lot of them are here tonight, and I want to salute them, and said we aren't going to continue to put untreated sewerage into the ocean, we are actually going to exercise a little bit of people power and get a little bit of common sense going and if needs be we will march, if needs be we will lobby, if needs be we will be that active, but we will actually go out with a group of others that feel the same way as we do like minded Australian's that reckon that the coast should be better looked after and we will campaign to stop that and the Manly Environment, the Beach and the community here has been much the better of with action.

The Environment Centre since that time and as you know it was the first of its kind, a suburban Environment Centre, I think that's a very significant achievement, the support that you got from Blackmores and Macquarie. The first of its kind but also the first of its kind to do something which I reckon is terribly important as we front up some of the big issues, and some of these issues take a while to work their way through and that is, this Environment Centre worked with business, you had the

support of Blackmores and Macquarie in the early period, worked closely with council, worked closely with State Government where needed and necessary, always worked closely with community and with a singular vision to protect the natural and built heritage of Manly, and that was a really really powerful thing, for a centre like this to be able to do.

And the focus is important for this centre and it's a focus that I can really relate to, that's having a free exchange of ideas and information on the environment which empowers people to work together, and they sound like one of those sentences that someone speaks out on a stage, but it actually goes to the heart of what makes this country work well. And I often think when I am sitting in the parliament we have parliament coming up and the treasurer will bring down the budget, but you know friends we don't figure into that budget, the extraordinary value that community groups, non government organizations, neighbourhood groups and groups like Manly Environment Centre actually give to the country, to the community, that's not reflected in the budget, but I know one day it will.

So, it's a tremendous privilege for me to come back again, this is my third time back and I think really when I reflect on what you have done, in particular since the first Rio Earth Conference in 1992 which provided quite a big stimulation, for the community here in Manly and the Manly Environment Centre, and just I guess focus in on the fact that in order to get ourselves in balance, and now the challenges are great because of climate change and global warming, the challenges are great because in the last couple of years we have seen a number of our capital cities roll into drought, including this city, we have seen our river systems suffer some pretty severe stress and I think we all know regardless of our political affiliation that this is one issue that we can't leave alone, its one issue that we have to pay serious attention to and one of the best ways that can happen is to have a centre like Manly Environment Centre, staffed in the way it has been with students coming through, with volunteers, with community groups, with activists and others making a contribution and it has and it produces light and good knowledge and good action out into the wider community and whether it's the state of the pines, or the penguins or whether its whats happening on North Head, whether it's the marine environment, whether it's the research materials being generated on site, this is a fabulous local community asset and it

deserves the kind of applause and also the fantastic singing and the fantastic debates that people have been able to produce for it today.

So I won't talk for too long, we spend our lives talking when we are politicians and one of my favourite bands is going to get up and play in a minute, I can't believe I got that lucky.

I came down to a place where I used to live and I loved it, and you know that feeling, it's the same for all of us, there's a sense of anticipation when you come down the hill, if your coming down Raglan Street, if your coming across on the Ferry, maybe its this time of the year when it has cooled down a little bit but the air is clear and there's a magic here, there's no question about it, this is a place of true beauty and its great for me to be back here and to wish Manly Environment Centre a very, very happy and successful 15th birthday, may there be many more.

Thank you