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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FRENCH ORDER OF ARTS & LETTERS PARIS, FRANCE

26 JUNE 2009

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Monsieur le Ministre [Frederic Mitterand] je vous remercie our la bienvenue [Thank you for your welcome].

Mesdames, Messieurs.

Firstly, to say what a great honour this is for me and to say to the Minister how much I appreciate not only the conferring of this honour but also that we were able to meet and speak together very freely and with a great deal of feeling about the arts.

It is important for me to say that to receive a high award from a country with such a profound and rich cultural history as France is a distinct honour and it is no exception to say that I feel very humbled.

So I want thank the people of France, not just on my own behalf, but on behalf of my country.

I also want to say in the first instance that I accept this award recognising that I owe it in many ways to others not here in Paris today. Namely, my family; my wife Doris and children Emily, May and Grace, who can't be here with me but who have always been my support. And of course to my colleagues in collaboration and inspiration, the members of Midnight Oil; Jim Moginie, Rob Hirst, Martin Rotsey and Bones Hillman and our manager Gary Morris.

It was the joint endeavour of delivering our music – a music rooted in our experience as Australians and of our understanding of the country we grew up in that enabled me to live and work as an artist.

Importantly it also allowed us to meet many people along the way, including of course Australia's Indigenous people. These experiences and our observations including our strong political views of course became the subject of our work and our performances for a significant period.

We came out of the suburbs of the city of Sydney but touring rock 'n roll bands are like modern day troubadours in search of new places and new audiences. And so in time we came to France – where culture is so pre-eminent, where the appreciation of culture is so evident and where we too, were lucky to find an appreciative crowd.

France turned out to be a natural fit – a place where politics, culture and life's expression freely intermingle and converge. This is the same spirit that we brought to our music.

One thinks of artists as distinct as Miles and Hemmingway but there are so many more who have been taken into the French embrace. And for us, coming from another hemisphere and with the first tentative forays in the clubs in Monmartre to the seasons at the Bercy, we too were welcomed with open arms. This is all an artist can wish for.

But is this altogether surprising? For in my new role as a Member of Parliament there stands in the southern part of my electorate the suburb of La Perouse, named after the famous French explorer who arrived in Botany Bay and who is still commemorated there.

And we have welcomed the French contribution to our more recent history with Australia's first foreign consulate being the French one with Jean Faramond flying the French flag at Millers point at history. And to this day Australian artists across all art forms take up temporary residence at the Cite Internationale, and writers at the Keesing Literary Studio in Paris.

France's cherished goals of liberty, egalitarianism and fraternity have their reflection in many of the efforts that artists undertake contributing to fairness, collaboration and access to the arts for all.

The Ordre des Arts et des Lettres is an invitation to continue to serve the arts for the benefit not only of my own country but for people in the wider world and I accept with gratitude this great honour as a musician and now as a politician who is the Minister responsible for the Arts and Culture and who serves in the Australian Parliament strongly asserting the value of the creative endeavour of artists.

That endeavour is a great human enterprise that nourishes, sustains and informs us in your country and in ours.

Thank you

[ENDS]