



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MIKE CARLTON, RADIO 2GB, 23 MARCH 1989

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CARLTON: Prime Minister, good morning.

PM: Good morning Mike.

CARLTON: Are you surprised at the passion that this is generating?

PM: No, not particularly. That's something that in a sense had to be expected and had to be dealt with. I mean you don't make decisions on the basis of passionate feelings because if you did that you'd never make any decisions because just about any area of politics these days where important decisions are involved, there will be some group who have got passionate feelings the other way. You'd never make any decisions if you go at them that way.

CARLTON: It does have the potential though for quite a serious split in the Party doesn't it? A lot of the Right here in New South Wales think they've been sold out.

PM: Well of course it's causing problems in the Party. I was not unaware of that and I guess in the six years that I've been Prime Minister I've tried to keep my ears and antenna finely tuned to political reactions. You're damned stupid if you don't. But in the end you've got to make the decisions which you think are correct and that's what I've done. In my case for instance, I started off with a presumption, Mike, on economic grounds and aviation principals that the Badgery's Creek was the right decision. I went through this process starting from that presumption and fairly strongly from that, but the more that I probed, the more information I asked for, the more statistics that were gathered in relation to the various assumptions that one has to make as to what's the right decision, the more I - and my advisers I might say - were moved inexorably from a Badgery Creek fast tracking approach to this combined approach of the third runway and starting to prepare Badgery's.

CARLTON: Is that partly because Badgery's Creek would have just been hugely expensive, billions of dollars?

PM: Well, that's one of the elements and some the expense of that by some may have been overstated, but it is the fact that if you were to pursue the Badgery's Creek option as the immediate fast track option, then there is no doubt that that would have been considerably more expensive. The question really turned upon the series of assumptions you had to make as to when an upgraded Mascot, that is a Mascot with a third runway, what series of assumptions you made as when that upgraded facility would itself reach saturation point. Now the presumption that I tended to make early in my consideration of it was that point would be reached sometime perhaps near the mid 1990s. In other words you could be faced with a situation I thought where you could build the third runway and by the time it was actually built, you would be nudging up against the capacity constraints. So the essence of the decision you had to make was to look at the series of assumptions that are involved in when an upgraded Mascot reached saturation point, the further that point was out, the more economic sense overwhelmingly it made to go ahead with the third runway.

CARLTON: So you're simply saying there's a lot of life in Mascot left with a third runway?

PM: Yes, and if in fact there hadn't been, there would have been absolutely no point in proceeding with it. You just don't go and spend hundreds of millions of dollars to build a third runway on the basis that when, in a matter of just a very short period of time it's up against saturation. But all the evidence that came together and which persuaded me and those advising me and other Ministers, including Paul, it was clear that that point was much further out.

CARLTON: Alright. Is there a chance of the decision being overturned by the full Caucus?

PM: I don't believe so. I mean, obviously some of my colleagues have very strong feelings about this and may I say, in respect to them, that it's not just a matter, the understandable concern about their seats that some of them have, but I say with respect to them that on the information that they've had they probably feel as well that on economic grounds it's not the right decision. It's not just that Peter Baldwin and these people had an emotional personal interest, and the interests of their constituents, I mean I think they probably believe that the sort of considerations I've put to them they are not aware of all the statistics probably.

CARLTON: Do you expect a move to have it overturned in the Caucus?

PM: Whether it there'd be an actual move to have it overturned, I think obviously when we go to Caucus and report on the matter there will be an opposing view put. I guess if they thought they had the numbers to overturn it they might try and that, but I would be confident that in this matter rationality would prevail. Let me say this Mike by the way too, that the considerations that are involved are not all bad for the people around the area. I mean the fact is, let me say, that for those affected by the east-west runway, and that's the majority of the seats concerned, there will in fact be an overwhelming reduction in aircraft movements because with the opening up of the third runway, which will give you two parallel north-south operations, by definition the possible use of the east-west runway is -

CARLTON: Yes.

PM: We will in fact make a decision that the only circumstances in which that east-west runway will be used in the very limited number of adverse weather conditions. In fact, given the statistics, that means that when it's operational you will have a reduction from some 72,000 movements on the east-west runway down to just over 2,000. An absolutely massive reduction, so that the majority in fact of the people in the electorates around there will have just a massive reduction in noise. It is true, let me say, it is true that for a couple of the electorates, that's Sydney and Grayndler, there will be some increase. I don't avoid that.

CARLTON: They're safe seats so it doesn't really affect you does it?

PM: I beg your pardon?

CARLTON: They're safe seats though aren't they?

PM: They're not regarded as safe seats in these circumstances and that's part of the concern.

CARLTON: Alright -

PM: And more in regard to these east-west runs is regarded as one where these rational facts will prevail. People have a concern that there's so much emotion invested in the argument, that people won't respond to facts. Well, we'll see about that.

CARLTON: Are you planning a Cabinet reshuffle at all? It looks like Mr Punch will be moved I suppose, does it?

PM: No, I've been very straight forward about this, there's no reason to be otherwise. I just asked - as you read

(PM cont): about, you know, something like a quarter to two in the morning yesterday after we'd finished the consideration of Cabinet - I asked Gary to come in and we had a very amicable discussion. It was agreed that he should consider his position, I mean not that I would be determined in my decision, by his feeling, but the sensible, decent thing to do was to say to him 'well look, do you want to think about your position in this portfolio' and he appreciated the way in which I raised it. He said he'd like to think about it, he'll come back to me and tell me what he thinks and I will make a decision, not only just in terms of what his thinking is but mine. So there's nothing (interrupted) about that.

CARLTON: I was just thinking of a couple of other elements as well. I mean Senator Walsh the other day indicated he'd like another job perhaps, that he's tired. You're going to have to move Mr Punch probably. Have you considered a wider Cabinet reshuffle?

PM: No I have not. There's no way in which Senator Walsh will be shifted. I mean, again I've been completely open and frank with the public about that and I'm prepared to just quickly to make the point again. It is a fact that Peter came and saw me. He said he was rather tired and it is an emotionally wearing portfolio as you know Mike. It's the Mr No. Peter is, you know, a profoundly decent man, he doesn't like having to say no to a lot of the things that we've had to say no to, or cutting back on some of the things we've had to cut back. He doesn't get any personal pleasure out of that, but he's had to do it and that imposes an enormous amount of strain. He talked to me about it, but as a result of those conversations he said 'well certainly I'm going to stay on' -

CARLTON: You will go to the next -

PM: shifting from that portfolio.

CARLTON: You will go to the next election with the Ministry substantially the same as it is now?

PM: Yes indeed.

CARLTON: There's rumblings, a lot of rumblings at the moment about an election in July. Would you rule that out?

PM: Look, this desperate, shallow Howard is running around, and every time he opens his mouth he's incapable of saying it as it is. Now for reasons best known to himself and which are fairly clear though, I guess, he's trying to say a July election because he's trying to create some impression that the tax cuts that we've promised now for a very long

(PM cont): time on the basis of our consistently worked out policies, including policies in the area of tax, we've consistently said, from way back in last year, they'll be coming in from July 1.

CARLTON: Alright.

PM: So that decision is based upon our clearly and consistently formulated policies. This policy-less fellow who can't get out a policy on anything, the bloke who told us early last year that all his policies, including tax policy, would be out by August of 1988 and still hasn't got his policy out, still won't tell the people what it is, where he's going to cut their expenditures in education, defence, health and so on to pay for additional tax cuts. Still can't do that. He's got to try and cover and say 'oh well, the Government is bringing their tax cuts out then because they're going to have an election in July'. Wrong again. He can't ever get it right. One of the reasons he can't get it right is because he can't get his own policy position. He failed to deliver on the promises he's made, that he would have his own tax policies ready by August of last year. So what does he do? Tries to divert attention by saying there's going to be an election in July? Every time he opens his mouth he's wrong, he's wrong on this.

CARLTON: I'm going to ask you again, are you ruling out a July election then?

PM: I'm ruling out a July election.

CARLTON: Flatly, no chance?

PM: Flatly, no chance.

CARLTON: I've got to follow it along then, is it going to be later on this year?

PM: Look, I have nothing to add to what I've said. If there's one area where I've been totally consistent in regard to elections, the next election, is this. I have said, I repeat to you, that the period that one would talk about would be from the end of this year, the latter part of this year until approximately the middle of 1990. I repeat, I don't feel myself in an 1989 election mode.

CARLTON: Alright, can I throw a personal question at you? You've probably had enough of those in the recent days, but you're campaigning up in the Hunter region aren't you, Singleton, around there?

PM: When you say campaigning. I am up in Singleton, I'm talking to you from a motel room in Singleton.

CARLTON: Alright, you're meeting the people, is what I'm getting at?

PM: Yes, but I'm just making a point. It's not a semantic point when I say I'm not campaigning. I mean, that means that when I've been in Singleton or elsewhere in the months after the last election, I'm campaigning. Part of my interest in politics, part of the thing that I get the most joy about is moving around the country (interrupted) that's what I'm doing at the moment.

CARLTON: This is what I want to ask you about, simply this. The statement you made on the Clive Robertson interview that you'd been unfaithful to Mrs Hawke, how has it been received in this meeting of the people that you've done in the last couple of days?

PM: All I can say - just let me make one point as to the statement I made on that program - I had no idea as to what I was going to be asked, I was asked a question, I answered it honestly, directly, not for any political purpose at all because when I get asked a question about life, well my record shows that I answer them as they come. It wasn't made for any reason other than that. What's the reaction? All I can say is that the people that I meet both in numbers and attitude are as enthusiastic as they have ever been.

CARLTON: Alright, Prime Minister thanks very much.

PM: Thank you very much indeed Mike.

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