



# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
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## **E&OE PROOF COPY**

**J:** Prime Minister, you have taken the unusual step of getting a letter published in Le Monde, why?

**PM:** As I said, the Government would proselytise on this issue in France. That is, say to the French people why we think it is not in France's interest and it is unreasonable that they should continue this program when the best course of action available for the French nation is to engage the rest of the world. And, if we want to talk about threats, the threat to France is not someone dropping a bomb on France, it is someone dropping a cloud on France - a nuclear cloud. From those old decaying power stations in the Ukraine and in Russia, these are the real issues that face continental Europe and some sort of Maginot Line of the 1990s is not the answer. The answer is engagement. I think we have tried to say that reasonably. The other thing, I think, about the French is, another reason why it gets up our nose is that we don't expect democracies to behave this way. This is a democracy we have twice gone to war for. This is a democracy that believes in liberty in a very profound way and yet it is acting in a colonial way in the Pacific and while there is no dispute about what is or what isn't French territory, this is not part of metropolitan France, it is a colonial view and one expects, in the end of the 20th century, for democracies to behave in a way which other democracies can approve of.

I suppose it is this which particularly annoys Australians and annoys those other people in the world who believe the French are out of line.

**J:** President Chirac has told his fellow European leaders that the protests against his decision are irrational - your view?

- PM: Well, they are not and, I think, the content of my letter to the French newspaper indicates in a very sober rational way the point of objection by Australia, but again, we have got to point out what we object to and what we believe is in France's interest while acknowledging that they have committed themselves to a limited series of tests and signing the comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. That will be important, not just to them, but to all of us.
- J: So are you going to target the French electorate now rather than the French administration?
- PM: When I announced last Thursday evening the range of measures which the Government was prepared to undertake, one of them was proselytising in France, articulating the government's view about this subject and this is perhaps the first initiative in this respect.
- J: Your letter to the people, is it in any way an admission that the diplomatic channels have failed?
- PM: No, I think, France is a sovereign country, it can make sovereign decisions. That's not to say they are immune from criticism. This is one of the ways of indicating that any criticisms that we might make are reasonable and rational and letting the more critical group of people in France take account of Australian views first hand.
- J: Are you concerned that Robert Ray didn't sign the petition yesterday?
- PM: I don't know who has signed the petition and who has not.
- J: Prime Minister, President Chirac has said that the French government will pay the costs of Australian scientists being sent to the test zone, are we going to take that up?
- PM: We are not in the business of playing games. Any offer we would take up would be for comprehensive assessment of the site. That is, comprehensive on site seismic, not being part of some charade about assessments of the impact upon sub-terranean corals and the rest. It would have to be, probably, an international effort and it would need to be completely comprehensive. I don't think there is any chance of the French fobbing anybody off with games about the impact upon Mururoa, we can establish scientifically what the impact is, if they wish that to be so. But, the point of objection is the fact that the Cold War has finished and the thing to get on with is the anti proliferation policies of those countries who believe that weapons proliferation is a very grim prospect and that a large part of the problem is actually in the old Soviet Union and in other parts of Europe. That is the point of concentration. Not on further developing the existing inventory of weapons which the French already have.

J: Prime Minister, is Kerry Packer being punished for his support of John Howard when we are talking about cross media?

PM: No, I think, there is a very clear view on the part of the government that the cross media rules have produced a lot of diversity. We now have a radio industry which is almost entirely independently owned from the newspapers. This was never so in the past. The Macquarie Network was owned by Fairfax, the other big network was owned by the Herald and Weekly Times. This is not true today, we have seen other independent owners of the two big broadsheets - The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age - with Conrad Black's group. We are seeing different ownership in the free to air television stations. So, the government's cross media rules of the 1980s have worked. What we have seen is legal devices to move around them, by keeping it clear that we will allow some ownership, some cross ownership but not where there is control, not where there is virtually a co-incidence of interests. This the government sought to do by tightening up its cross media arrangements yesterday with the 15 per cent. This will apply to Mr Packer's interest in print as it will to Mr Murdoch's interests in television.

J: You are not just getting square with Mr Packer?

PM: Well, I was asked that earlier.

J: Are these the last changes to the rules?

PM: As we can see them at the moment, but again, lawyers will always try to find ways around these things. The question is, is Australia advantaged by media diversity? And, if the answer to that is in the affirmative, and I believe it is, then we need a set of rules which bring this about. Otherwise, simply the convergence of technologies and corporate financial power will mean that we will have a continuing concentration of ownership. This the government has resisted and, I think, resisted successfully. Thank you.

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