



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH GRAHAM WORLD, "AM PROGRAM", ABC RADIO,
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At the South Pacific Forum in Papua New Guinea, Mr Keating has said now that his Health Minister has appeared at the Easton Royal Commission in Perth, there is not much value in it continuing. He was echoing the sentiments of Dr Lawrence, who last night resumed her media campaign, calling for the inquiry to be closed down and adding that it is unlikely to produce a balanced report. Mr Keating, meanwhile, says he will ignore the Commission's findings. The Prime Minister spoke to Graham World in Madang last night.

GW: Prime Minister, today's communique will include an endorsed code of conduct to restrict logging in the region. But it doesn't guarantee that unsustainable logging practices can be reigned in in countries where it is going on.

PM: Well nothing can guarantee that. The Pacific Forum is just the sort of ... is basically a community advisory organisation. It has no legally binding strength. But the communique today, was endorsed unanimously by all the countries - the code of conduct for logging and, of course, a year ago we had a snowball's chance in hell of getting any of this endorsed. And now it has come back, it has been endorsed by everybody. Vanuatu is currently taking regulations before their Ministerial Council. Papua New Guinea is in the position of, I think in the next few months, being able to adopt the code for their own forestry operations.

GW: What about the Solomons?

PM: Well for the Solomons it has been up to them whether they adopt it, but they have endorsed it.

GW: On French nuclear testing, would you have expected anything beyond the extreme outrage that the Forum statement has agreed upon?

- PM: Well I don't think there is much else that the Forum can do as it has already been party to delegations to Paris, it has already expressed itself in the strongest way in the past. We have now seen one weapon detonated and it's a case of continuing to keep the pressure on France.
- GW: Nauru's President wanted the French Minister for Cooperation excluded from the post-Forum dialogue to take place in Port Moresby on Monday. Why not go down that route?
- PM: Well there was no support for that because I think for some countries here, smaller Pacific island states, their only contact with France is actually through this dialogue point every year. For those, of course, who have embassies and structured relations with France, it doesn't matter. But you have got to remember there are many countries that are very small - you know, with just populations of 70,000 and less - and their only contact with France is at post-Forum dialogues. So I think they took the view they are better to have a link than no link.
- GW: Tomorrow you will be attending the 20th Anniversary celebrations for Papua New Guinea's independence. Would you agree that the economic difficulties in PNG, in recent years, have placed the bilateral relationship under more strain than previously?
- PM: Oh not as much strain as it would be under had there not been independence. I mean if it was still basically a trust territory, a colony of Australia, then we would have a lot more problems than we have ever had in the period of independence. It was a right step for Australia and a right step for Papua New Guinea.
- GW: We are giving about \$300 million annually in aid. It is being shifted to program aid. Isn't one of the difficulties that Australia is dictating to PNG really how that money should be spent?
- PM: No I don't think so. It is just that Papua New Guinea has got now a revenue base of its own, it is a country that has got a lot of resources, mining in particular, and it doesn't need the Australian appropriation to come as budget aid. Rather, we get a better bang for the buck coming as program aid and the communities can see the immediate impact of Australian spending in such areas as schools and education and roads. Whereas, if it goes as a budget, it disappears into the accounts of the Papua New Guinea Government. So we decided long ago, Australia I mean, that we would make this transfer from budget aid to program aid and we are just about half way.
- GW: Just finally, while you have been overseas this week, Carmen Lawrence has appeared before the Royal Commission. You supported her going there in public statements. But what has she achieved?

PM: Well she has had a chance to put her view in a structured and orderly way after other people, who have had a counter-view, have had the opportunity to have their view put and publicised. So I think that is what she has achieved. What is the value of the Commission after this? I think not much.

GW: Will her appearance influence the outcome?

PM: I don't know. But given the narrow terms of reference and the political nature of it, I don't think it matters very much.

GW: So what you are saying, still, is wind up the Commission immediately?

PM: Exactly. I think it was an outrage at the beginning with the terms of reference the way it was framed and no matter how conscientious the Commissioner might try to be, one can only work within the terms of reference a Commissioner is given.

GW: Is Dr Lawrence still a positive selling point for the Government in the next election?

PM: Well I think she remained that right through the period and I think the Australian community are quite smart about these things. They know when there is a lark on and they know there is an abuse of executive power here. Royal Commissions are things which have been very valuable to Australia, very valuable. What Richard Court and John Howard have sought to do is to trash them as an institution to try and abuse their powers, the powers of the Royal Commission, to try and abuse it to seek out an opponent. And, of course, in Richard Court's case, he was not simply content to defeat Carmen Lawrence at the election, but he has now tried to destroy her personally. He is very spiteful and very vindictive and will be, of course, ignored in this exercise by us.

GW: Prime Minister, thanks for joining us.

PM: Thank you, Graham.

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