



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
DOORSTOP, ORANGE CIVIC THEATRE, ORANGE, 20 SEPTEMBER 1995**

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J: Mr Keating, there was some expectation that there may be an announcement pending or today on the freight terminal proposal ... freight terminal in Parkes. You alluded that sort of need, is it likely it would be there?

PM: What I did say today is that I have now asked my two colleagues - Laurie Brereton and Bob Collins, that is the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Primary Industries - to come back to me with a report about the needs of air freight capacity and specialised air freight facilities for this country. I think it is true that much of the air freight has been prioritised around the passenger needs and obviously the big terminals at Sydney and Melbourne are in the main, configured as passenger facilities. We need to do better with freight. Whether it is done in Sydney or Melbourne or Parkes or wherever, at least we will get an idea, I should hope, of what we need and then think about what sort of strategies we need to employ to bring them ...

J: It seems that there is very strong support for an airport here in this region, something they wouldn't enjoy in western Sydney ...

PM: No, but by the same token, I think, these things can't be sub economic, they have to be economic. So, we need to see by some analysis whether such an investment would actually be a productive thing for the country. If the country spends its scarce capital into sub economic resources then we move backwards. We have always got to keep moving forward, so we can only do that with investments which are, of their essence, productive and that requires us to do at least the feasibilities and look at the requirements of the air freight industry as a whole. I think we can do that.

J: Mr Keating, you spoke very strongly about environment issues today, the relationship with the land, what is your response to the green movement threats to withdraw ...

PM: I thought you would notice that the Conservation Foundation came out contradicting that story in the Sydney Morning Herald on Monday, by a part of the NSW conservation movement. We are going to do, I think, as good a job as can be done on putting into place a sustainable basis of forestry in this country. It is a difficult thing in a federation like this to sign the States up and to get them all committed at once to a strategy which defines adequate reserve systems, looks at sustainable practices et cetera. But, we are now in that process and I have got now doubt while we are in the process we will get a bit of jockeying along by various interest groups and prodding along, but we will be doing our very best for the environment and for having a decent forest products industry.

J: Which States take the most persuading ... (inaudible) ...

PM: That is a question for other than a news conference. I'd need to go back and look and see where we think people are, but again, I am hopeful that we can conclude some good thing nationally.

J: Mr Keating, the polls today show the environment is one out of 8 out of 13 policy areas people think that the Opposition could do a better job in and they don't have policies. How hard is that going to make it for you to as you told your backbench to get out there and sell yourself?

PM: I think the Opposition are into basically environment chainsaw policies by and large. I think, they are the chainsaw specialists in the Australian environmental debate and I don't really think that most people that have the environment at heart think the Coalition would serve their interests. If you look at the things we have done in Australia, they have been - over a decade - quite profound for the environment, under this Labor Government and we are still doing it in all those areas which are most difficult to do, like forestry, very difficult. Landcare, the thing I have just-been speaking about, salinity, soil degradation. No government but this Labor Government has tackled those things - the Murray-Darling, in a serious way, water - these are the big environmental issues and we are the only ones, I think, either competently taking them on or successfully taking them on.

J: What does it say to you though that a lot of people obviously believe the Opposition will do a better job?

PM: The public are quite smart about needling governments along, they are always making you sit ... you know, putting the burr under your saddle.

J: But how can you do that ... the polls such as that would rate the Opposition ahead on virtually all of the major issues?

PM: These are the sorts of questions I used to get asked in 1992. I used to give the same sorts of answers.

J: Is Carmen Lawrence a factor ... (inaudible) ...

PM: I'm not here to play press gallery games.

J: Mr Keating, I've got a few staff and I've got to organise Christmas holidays, can I do it safely knowing the election will be after Christmas?

PM: I've always said the public expect us to squeeze as much value out of these parliaments as we can and I'm certainly lining my holiday up. So, why should I muck yours about.

J: ... 94 per cent of our food companies are off shore, are you concerned about that, should we be concerned about that and what can we do?

PM: Well I don't know whether it is as high as that figure. But there is a substantial number that are owned offshore. But the main thing is that they develop in a way which works for Australia. That is, that their product and the growth of their product works in our domestic economy and in our external accounts and to our greater wealth. I think they are. But that is not to say that we shouldn't have a good sustainable agri-business in this country which is Australian-owned. Some substantial chunks of it are Australian-owned and I would like to see those grow.

J: Where?

PM: Where are they going to come from? I think they are going to come from the sort of businesses which we have seen in this region, Manildra, the Dubbo Abattoir - these sorts of businesses. I mean entrepreneurship always proves, I think, where you see good entrepreneurs that they can grow a sensible business. But also having those linkages into the multi-national corporations is a good thing for Australia. It does give us market access around the region that we mightn't otherwise have.

J: Mr Keating, the Opposition Leader is unveiling a foreign debt billboard at the front entrance of Parliament House this afternoon. He obviously believes that is a big vote winner, yet you are playing that down ...

PM: He is also telling the MTIA what the Coalition will do for business and I can tell the business community what the Coalition will do for business. The first thing they will do is scrap the Accord. The next

thing that will happen is you will get sporadic wage breakouts, any central bank will then stick up interest rates to try and hold inflation, growth will then dip, the profit share will get knocked about and the whole cooperation at the workplace will go and, of course, the thing that will go with it is job growth. So I mean that is what the Coalition is going to do for business and that is the other thing they are doing today.

J: Prime Minister, you have spoken in your speech about the current account deficit. How more confident are you about reducing that deficit, given ABARE's forecast yesterday

PM: Well they were both good numbers as you intimate. ABARE's export projections were encouraging and I think that 8 per cent drop in imports yesterday tends to confirm the view that the Statistician put at the last balance of payments release. That is, that it has peaked and it is probably on the way down. If that is the case, of course, we get back to some more sustainable rates on the current account deficit. But it is a point I was making earlier to the conference. In a continent this large, we are always going to need capital requirements greater than our savings - railways, ports, wharves, mines, farms, factories. We will never in a country this big, ever, afford them just from our domestic savings and that is no bad thing. It is like a person buying their home. They can't afford it from their own domestic savings. They use someone else's, but they grow an asset. We are using someone else's and we are growing an asset too.

J: Mr Keating, you were speaking in regard to the drought and what the Government has done for it still worried about anomalies for exceptional circumstances. Is there going to be a review?

PM: Well I don't know that there are anomalies with it. There are, maybe, perceived or argued anomalies. We have this body called RASAC, which advises us on which particular districts ought to be appropriately declared as exceptional circumstance areas. And where we think there have been, let's say, difficult circumstances - but not exceptional under the criteria - we have sought to do some special things for those districts. Some of them, of course, in New South Wales. But we are about to receive a RASAC report and you know if the tom-toms mean anything, some of the shires around this district may qualify.

J: Mr Keating, this district covers a broad cross section of the society I believe you have polling showing that if the Government stops hereafter is that a reflection on your

PM: I don't know. I mean David Simmons has kept on coming back and Rob's going to take his place, we think. So I think we are confident about it. But, again, competence is one thing, work and effort is another and I think care, commitment, work effort, diligence to a local

community is what makes the result in the end and we have been doing that.

J: Mr Keating, as a folliclely-challenged member of the Press Gallery, is there any truth to the claim that you are banning photographs from behind?

PM: Well I saw that story in the Sydney Morning Herald today and let me assure you the story is completely inaccurate and completely wrong. I have had no conversation with the Speaker about this, none whatsoever, nor has a member of my staff. The Speaker did this on his own initiative with the Sergeant-At-Arms. Mr Seccombe from the Herald was told that. But Mr Seccombe has no respect for accuracy or truth and he gets that, of course, from the leadership of the Sydney Morning Herald, which has a very low premium on accuracy or truth in reporting.

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