

78/133

INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN WILLIAMS,  
ABC SCIENCE UNIT, FOLLOWING  
LAUNCHING OF "AUSTRALIAN ENDANGERED  
SPECIES"

---

Question

Your presence here (inaudible) for the launching of a book on Australian Endangered Species obviously indicates that you think the subject is an extremely important one. Could you tell us why?

Prime Minister

Yes, I do think it is an important one. Too often people have been careless of their natural heritage, their flora and fauna, and they've gone in, they've settled areas, bush has been knocked down, crops have been planted and grasses sown and there has been no real concern for the consequences. Now I believe that we've got to a stage where we understand and do need to assess the total land use of this nation. This is our responsibility -- to make sure that it's used to the best advantage taking into account economic matters as well as matters of conservation.

Question

So you do think it's a political question?

Prime Minister

Well, governments have to make decisions. Governments have to decide to set aside adequate parks. Governments need to have adequate conservation policies - need a Wildlife Service and so there is a very real role in the governments. But Government would find it very difficult if there wasn't a very widespread interest and concern amongst the general community. At the same time a great many knowledgeable and dedicated amateurs can greatly assist in the preservation of Australian wildlife.

Question

You gave a list of some of the initiatives that the Federal Government has taken, will be taking. What really do you think is left that is in the future going to be taken to (inaudible).

Prime Minister

I think probably to learn more about species. A great deal is known of some. There are others that might be extinct, are believed to be extinct or haven't been seen for a very long while but maybe there'd be a lucky person who will be able to prove that a particular species still exists.

Prime Minister (continued)

The Australian continent is so large and some of the species possibly who inhabit such a small part of the continent; some are hard to see or find in any case and great distances need to be covered. That will probably be a very long while before we know all there is to be known, if that ever occurs, about Australia's wildlife. So collecting documentation, the accumulation of knowledge -- because without knowledge you can't have the appropriate conservation rules and procedures. There might be a particular aspect of the environment which is quite essential to the survival of a species. Unless you know what that aspect is, you can't make sure that the environment won't be damaged in a way and might further endanger the species. This isn't something - the collection of knowledge isn't something that can be covered in six months or a year. This is a continuing scientific search and so far as I am concerned the more energy and initiative that can be put into it the better.

Question

The International Conference in Russia suggested that arid zones such as those Australia has (inaudible), should go into farming of indigenous species and European ones.

Prime Minister

I think that is a somewhat dubious suggestion. I believe that you need wilderness areas or areas set aside as national parks where indigenous species can and will be preserved and in many of these areas there is nothing much to farm. If people understand Australia and (inaudible) of this nation; you can count one casualty - it is the wildlife alone that survives in some areas. You get areas in the back parts of the country where you can run (inaudible) what native species would want farmed, or want to farm and even if you adopted that practice you would have the real problem of when (inaudible) What was farmed under farming conditions and what has been raided from national parks and wilderness areas and there have been many problems of a kind that I don't think I'd really want to see Australia get involved in. I don't think it's the best way to make sure we have adequate preservation of Australian wildlife. There is one thing that does concern me and it concerns, I know, wildlife authorities in the Northern Territory and that's the deprivations made by buffalo, feril cats and wild pig which, not being native to Australia, and the damage they can do to a natural environment thus damaging native Australian fauna and that I think is a serious question, especially since buffalo, pig and cats tend to (inaudible) up pretty rapidly. They can do enormous damage. That poses a real problem which I don't think - I think we understand it, I don't know that we know how to control it though.

Question:

Finally, what do you think of the book, "Australian Endangered Species".

Prime Minister

I think it's a very good book. I think it's been extremely well-produced. I would like to compliment the publishers. Obviously an enormous amount of hard work and care and effort has been put into it. As far as I am concerned the book is entertaining but it is also educational and if it would help to inspire more Australians to a real concern for Australian fauna then I would believe Professor Ovington would be happy. I think he has every right to be proud of the book.

---000---