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PRIME MINISTER

E. & O.E. - PROOF ONLY

Partial Transcript, PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED BY
JOHN LAWS, 2UE, 11/4/84

LAWS: Speaking of international markets it would appear that we have a problem with the Japanese decision on beef imports. That's going to hurt us a bit, isn't it?

P.M.: Well, it's too early to say. And I must say John that I'm terribly disappointed, and I think it's a disappointment that you would share with me - that the Federal Opposition have broken a rule - a long standing rule of politics that where a Government is engaged in negotiations on behalf of Australia with another country to try and protect markets and get increased access. That's in the past been regarded as sacrosanct, bipartisan you don't try and score party political points off that. Now unfortunately this totally dispirited and disappearing opposition has broken the rules. Now I have refrained to this stage from responding on that. On that, I simply want to say that when I was there we had discussions, not only with the Prime Minister, but with other people - and we were given certain undertakings. I have written to the Japanese Prime Minister reminding him of those undertakings. I've had the Japanese Ambassador in. Mr Kerin leaves today, the Minister for Primary Industry goes there. This Government could not have more - I've spent hours getting through on the phone to the Prime Minister. My Ambassador up there has been working and all our officials have been working too. And may I say that the official representatives of the rural industry recognise this and applaud what we are doing. We could not have done more and we will continue to do everything we can. What we've got to try and do is to see that there is - now that they have made a decision to increase the quota for the United States we've got to see that we can get an increase in the amount that Australia can get under global quota increase. And we are doing everything we possibly can, and I am certain John that out of those negotiations there will be an increased tonnage available to Australia and hopefully I think an increase in the proportion of that which will be chilled beef - which is more valuable. Now, all those things we are doing, and there is no Government that could be doing more than we are.

LAWS: Do you believe the Opposition have damaged our chances?

P.M.: Yes, well I think it's not helpful. I mean it stands to reason - it's not helpful if two things are done. In the Parliament they have attacked the Japanese Prime Minister - accused him of breaking his word. Before it's possible to judge in any sense whether that has happened. I don't think it makes sense in a

P.M.: continued

democracy like ours for an Opposition to be getting up and saying that while negotiations are going on. I am sure that doesn't help. And secondly to appear to be making it an internal political issue doesn't strengthen the hand of the Government. If in fact this Opposition when they were in Government could point to the fact that they had maintained the share of Australia under the Japanese market of beef imports under quota - that would be one thing. But the facts are John, that the Japanese beef imports under quota in the period from 1976 - the first year of their Government - Australia had 82.5% - in this last year 67.2%. Now, that's what happened under their period of office. Down from 82.5 to 67.2%.

LAWS: What's their excuse for that?

P.M.: I don't know, other than they were bargaining with hard bargainers I guess. But, I simply want to make the point that it would be crazy for us as a Government not to be doing everything we possibly can to get every last ounce of beef into the Japanese market.

LAWS: But that hasn't been the suggestion surely, that you don't want it.

P.M.: Well, what's the criticism - that we are not doing our best, that I should have dashed again up there, that I was remiss for not immediately racing to Japan - well, this is awful politics and I mean it really is an absurdity that you try and get some political advantage out of a situation like this. If it can be shown that we were not doing everything we possibly could, that's one thing. If it can be shown also that they in Government had maintained a share of Australian beef in the Japanese market - that also would be another thing. But the facts are the opposite, they were not able to do that and we are doing everything we possibly can. All I would ask of the Opposition is that they try and realise that they do have a responsibility in certain areas to support Australia, and not engage in negative tactics as they are on this.

LAWS: Yes, but doesn't that rather reek of desperation, which is understandable desperation.

P.M.: Well, they have reason to be desperate, but ultimately you would still hope that they were decent people who were concerned to try and help Australia.

LAWS: Yes, I find it hard to come to terms with the fact that they could suggest or could even start to believe that any Government in respect of whether it is yours or theirs or any Government wouldn't be doing it's best for the country - otherwise what the hell is it there for?

P.M.: Exactly.