



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

27 September 1985

My attention has been drawn to a statement issued by the Leader of the Opposition which claims that I "wilfully misled" the Parliament in the tabling on 19 September of some documents relating to the Australian Bicentennial Authority.

At their most generous interpretation, the claims are extraordinarily misconceived, and at worst, they are deliberately misrepresentative of the situation as the Leader of the Opposition knows it.

It was never claimed that the documents which I tabled were exhaustive. I did not claim so. In fact, it is clear from my statement to the House that they related only to correspondence between myself and Mr Reid and departmental advice regarding authority for the settlement.

As for the record of the conversation which I had with Mr Reid on 15 August, that document was the subject of consultation with the Leader of the Opposition in the Chamber subsequent to tabling, because it had been tabled in error. This consultation related to the deletion of a segment of the record relating to a personal matter. The Leader of the Opposition agreed with the deletion, as the media is aware.

He understood it was tabled in error, yet now accuses me of wilfully misleading the Parliament by omitting to table a second page of the relevant document.

If the document was tabled in error in the first place, it can hardly be a deliberate omission to fail to table the second page.

The Leader of the Opposition also claims that the "omitted" section "recorded (my) instruction to Mr Reid to secure Dr Armstrong's resignation". What that section reiterated was that all of the views expressed regarding Dr Armstrong could

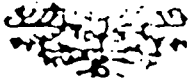
not be put aside, and so the matter should be looked at, with very serious consideration being given to finding a replacement. This is entirely consistent with the text of my detailed answer in the House of that day.

Furthermore, nothing of what I said on 15 August to Mr Reid can in any way be seen as an "instruction". As I said in my press release of 11 September and in the Parliament, I simply did not have the power to "instruct" the Chairman of the Authority in this matter. Mr Reid accepted this at all points in our discussions. That has been one of the central problems with this matter, because the previous coalition government established the Authority deliberately at arm's length from the responsible minister, severely inhibiting the control that the minister is able to exercise over it.

I have tried at all times to handle the whole subject of Australia's bicentenary celebrations in a bipartisan fashion. That is why I discussed the matter at length with the Leader of the Opposition, and it is why I arranged for the Leader of the Opposition to discuss the matter freely himself with Mr Reid as then Chairman of the Authority.

The Leader of the Opposition's own handling of this matter has been shabby and cheap. It is certainly unbecoming of one who sets himself up so assertively and sanctimoniously as "honest".

I attach the complete record of conversation, except for the deletion agreed to by the Leader of the Opposition on 19 September.



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

RECORD OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER AND
CHAIRMAN OF ABA, MR JOHN REID, A.O., ON 15 AUGUST, 1985.

The Prime Minister said that he had received a number of expressions of concern regarding the performance of Dr David Armstrong, the Chief Executive of the ABA, and indeed there had been a unanimity of view regarding his inadequacies in this position. It had been put to him that the prospects of success for the Bicentenary celebrations were likely to be substantially compromised if Dr Armstrong remained as Chief Executive.

Mr Reid put forward his reasons for believing that Dr Armstrong should be retained. At the same time he acknowledged problems, in Dr Armstrong's performance, including a rather informal style of administration inappropriate to the ABA, and a basic shyness, which tended towards aggressiveness and was reflected in the use of throw-away lines in Board meetings. Mr Reid said that he had already spoken to Dr Armstrong as a number of questions had previously been raised about his performance. As a result he felt that Dr Armstrong's administrative style had improved,

Essentially Mr Reid felt that the interests of the ABA and the Bicentenary would be prejudiced if Dr Armstrong was replaced. He also could not support the idea of putting in a "minder" for Dr Armstrong. Mr Reid said that from the end of 1985 he himself would be virtually a full-time Chairman, making it easier to address the problem.

IN CONFIDENCE

The Prime Minister said that while he respected Mr Reid's defence, he could not put aside all of the views put to him concerning Dr Armstrong, and so he would want the matter to be looked at, with very serious consideration being given to the question of finding a replacement. Mr Reid promised to get back to the Prime Minister on this matter by the following Monday, 19 August.

Graham Evans
Principal Private Secretary

19 August 1985

c.c. Prime Minister
c.c. Mr John Reid

IN CONFIDENCE