



PRIME MINISTER

E. & O.E. - PROOF ONLY

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JOURNALIST: Are we any closer to a new Chairman, Prime Minister?

PM: Yes every day brings us closer to the new Chairman but we are very fortunate that in the mean time we have an admirable interim Chairman in John Utz. And not only I, and the Government, but I think the people of Australia are indebted to him for moving in in these circumstances. And we appreciate it very much indeed.

JOURNALIST: When will the new Chairman be announced, Sir?

PM: I can't put a date on it. The important thing immediately is to continue the processes to find a new Chief Executive. And it is the objective of the Government and of the Authority to see that these two positions are filled as soon as possible.

JOURNALIST: public accountability.

PM: Well, you already have a sense of public accountability in the requirement of the Authority to have its accounts cleared by the Auditor-General and they have, in the past, been so cleared. In regard to the relationship between the Government and the Authority we, following discussions with John and the Board, will have a position where there will be a representative of the Government sitting in as observer and liaison person at meetings of the Board. There will be monthly reports coming to the Government from the Board on progress. And we will be getting quarterly statements of account from the Board. so, what we have to do, you see, and what we have succeeded in doing is to operate under the legislation that we inherited which separated the Board, the Authority, from the Government and the Parliament. Now with good sense discussions with the new Chairman and the Board, they have accepted that within those constraints, those legislative constraints that we have inherited, we will in this way that I have indicated get the new form of relationship and accountability which I think is necessary.

JOURNALIST: Will Mr Armstrong have to give any of his money back?

PM: I at this stage only have an interim report from the Solicitor-General. Perhaps by the end of the day that will be put in final form. And it is not fair to either Dr Armstrong or anyone else to make any comment on that until I have had the opportunity of studying that final document from the Solicitor-General.

JOURNALIST: On another issue ...

PM: Just before we go to other issues, I am not going to ...
If there are any other questions on this issue, let's have them
and then we will go to another one.

JOURNALIST: Are you happy that all other aspects of the ABA
are functioning well?

PM: Yes well look, in an Authority of this magnitude there
will probably be some elements that could be in a better position.
I think the Authority and the Board itself recognise that.
The important thing to be said is this - that a great deal of
good and valuable work is being done. There are over 520 community
committees established around Australia. And I have no doubt
at all, that on the basis of the work that has been done, the
new arrangements that will be made, and the new *people*
that will be in senior positions, that Australians can be totally
confident that as we come to 1988 we are going to have a great
bicentennial year.

JOURNALIST: What is your impression of the morale in the Board?

PM: Well I had a very useful, friendly constructive interchange
of views with the Board. And I was certainly left with the
impression - two things. One, that they are looking to the
future. They have a total and shared commitment with the Government
that we have a shared responsibility to ensure a great 1988.
And secondly, that they are going, as a Board, to do everything
they can in their power to achieve that objective with us.

JOURNALIST: Any anger up there, Sir, about the sacking of John
Reid?

PM: None conveyed to me.

JOURNALIST: Do you think the Authority can still continue
to act effectively while controversy still surrounds Dr Armstrong's
departure.

PM: Well I think that controversy that you refer to is diminishing.
I have made it quite clear that it was a decision that had to
be taken. It has been taken. And there is now another decision
that has flowed from it which means that there has to be a new
Chairman. Now, as Prime Minister it has given me no joy to
have to initiate and take those decisions, but I have a responsibility
to do it. It has been exercised and I am sure now that in the
event that the Bicentennial is going to be a great success.
And I repeat again that we are singularly fortunate that in
these circumstances Mr Utz has stepped in to fill the role of
Chairman in those circumstances.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, one of the great criticisms of
the older regime was that they were spending a lot of money
and going on overseas junkets. Have there been any concrete
proposals accepted now to reduce that so-called extravagance?

PM: Well there is the allegation about extravagance. I have referred to the arrangements that are now being made for an involvement by the Government to see what is going on. And I repeat, the elements of those are three. Firstly, there will be a representative of the Government who will be at the meetings of the Board. Secondly, there will be monthly reports to the government on the progress. And there will be quarterly statements of account to the government. Now I believe taking those three specific measures into account, plus the heightened awareness that will exist within the Authority of the concern that there shall be an accountability in the use of public funds, I am confident that there will be no cause for concern in regard to that issue.

JOURNALIST: Did your discussions with the Board today confirm that they needed a new leader?

PM: Well they have, as I said, I think, accepted what has happened. And they are looking to the future and looking to it with confidence. So there is no point for anyone in trying to re-hash the past. That as far as the Board is behind them.

JOURNALIST: Just briefly on the lands issue, the naval lands. Do you support the transfer of the naval lands in Sydney Harbour to Jervis Bay?

PM: Well, that is a totally unfair question to ask me whether I support it. I initiated it when I had to assume the office of the Prime Minister and come and live in this beautiful city of Sydney temporarily in the Kirribilli headquarters. I looked out across Sydney Harbour and it just struck me as an absurdity in this day and age that you should have a major naval concentration in the middle of a great populous city like this. It struck me immediately and I have talked to my colleagues about it.

And so, what is happening is that a study is being undertaken of the implications of transferring the navy from Sydney to Jervis Bay. Now clearly there is a lot of work that has to be undertaken because we have these considerations to take into account. Firstly, the defence interests of this country, and so any change in that way has to be handled in terms that will not in any sense compromise, but will add to our defence capability. And secondly you have to take into account then how the released land will best be made available for the benefit of the people of Sydney. And I must say in this regard, that from the earliest point I have shared my thoughts on this matter with the Premier of NSW who totally shares my view that this move is overwhelmingly in the interests of the people of Sydney and of NSW.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke when is it likely to go ahead?

PM: Well, you can't put an exact timetable on it, because, I repeat, there are lots of considerations that have to be taken into account, but the work has been done now. The Ministers have initiated enquiries. They are going ahead. And I think the only thing one can say is that conceptually it is clear that this ought to happen. When we get the detailed reports we will then consider it in Cabinet, and I hope, on the basis of the report that we get, we will be able to initiate the moves in the relatively near future.

JOURNALIST: Inaudible.

PM: I say initiate because you will appreciate that what is involved is a lengthy, long-term process.

JOURNALIST: Is the Navy in favour of the move?

PM: Well, I don't know that there is such a thing monolithically - the Navy. I can imagine that some elements of the Navy might not be entirely enamoured of the prospect of moving, but I think that those who are concerned, as there overwhelming would be, with the best interests of the Navy, and getting the most efficient setting for their operations. And that in the same context as ensuring the best interests of the civilian community, I am sure that they would regard it as appropriate.

JOURNALIST: governor-General accepted free overseas ...

PM: If you were in the Canberra Gallery you would know that one thing I don't answer is hypothetical questions.
