



PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE WITH THE MINISTER FOR ARTS,
HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENT, MR COHEN, AND THE MINISTER FOR PRIMARY
INDUSTRY, MR KERIN - MONDAY 15 DECEMBER 1986

PM: The Cabinet has had a lengthy consideration of the question of protecting National Estate values in Tasmania forests. It's made a decision that it will oppose forestry operations in National Estate areas of Tasmania until it can be satisfied that National Estate values are protected, or that there are not feasible alternatives. We want, as you will see from our press statement from the decision of Cabinet, to have the co-operation of the Tasmanian Government in this matter. To that intent the Minister, Mr Kerin, will actively pursue negotiations with his counterpart in Tasmania, Mr Groom, with a view to reaching agreement on feasible alternatives to forestry operations continuing in the National Estate areas. We would hope to secure such agreement, but in the event that that's not possible then we would seek, ourselves, to establish a review process. But we hope if the consultation with the Tasmanian Government doesn't produce agreement that they would, themselves, agree to a review process to examine the question of a feasible and prudent alternative. As I say, if we can't get that position, and we will try very hard to get it, then we would establish those review mechanisms ourselves. We have taken this decision conscious of the responsibility that we, as a national government, have to protect the National Estate. We also take the decision, in the way we have, conscious of the importance of the forestry industry to the State of Tasmania. We believe that if the processes we have decided upon are followed that there need not be any loss of jobs in Tasmania, because there are ample feasible alternative sources of supply available to replace those in the areas in question. We say therefore, as is indicated in the press release, we see no reason why a single job need be lost as a result of the Government's decision. I hope that as a result of the lengthy consideration that has been given to this important matter, and the decision that's been taken, that we're going to have a position in which those who properly have a deep concern for the preservation of the National Estate in this country, and those who, on the other hand, perhaps prime interest is the question of the economics of the forestry industry will be able to come together in a way which will produce a result which is acceptable. I make the point that really what is involved is in a sense ultimately testing a position which is common to the two protagonists, if you like. Let me make it clear, the conservation movement assert, and have asserted consistently, that there is no need to proceed with forestry

operations in the areas in question because there are ample feasible, prudent alternatives outside those areas. On the other hand, the Tasmanian Government and the Forestry Commission there and the industry disputes that proposition. So it seems to us sensible that that fundamental position be tested. We do not seek, as a Commonwealth Government, to impose a judgement upon Tasmania. That is not consistent with the approach to decision making which my Government has followed from the first day we've been in office. We seek co-operation of the Tasmanian Government and I hope that as a result of the discussions that John Kerin will be having with his counterpart, that that will be forthcoming. But we as a government are committed to processes which, as I say, will do all within the power of this government to protect National Estate values.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, do you believe that jobs will be now lost as the ACTU has said, because you have made a decision on this issue?

PM: No. As I said in my statement, there cannot, I believe, be any argument as to the immediate availability of alternative resources and provided the Tasmanian Government is co-operative those alternative resources can be turned to now while the processes of consultation and, if necessary, review are undertaken.

JOURNALIST: Who's going to conduct the review?

PM: What the decision makes clear is that we would seek, as I say, to get co-operation of the Tasmanian Government and if they will agree we can consult together on the composition of that review. And I hope that will be the case, that we can get their co-operation, if not then we would have to, ourselves, establish that review. We have made no decision as to composition, but the Cabinet decision leaves the composition of that review body to myself and John and Barry.

JOURNALIST: Mr Prime Minister, it does seem that the underlying thread of your announcement is that if it comes to a choice between jobs and the environment this government will choose to maintain jobs. Is this a fair summary?

PM: I don't think that puts it properly. You'll see at the beginning of the press release that we have issued, we are saying we are opposing forestry operations in National Estate areas of Tasmania until we're satisfied that National Estate values are protected, or there are not feasible alternatives. On the information available to us, we believe that you needn't necessarily be looking at one, or the other, and an essential part of decision we've taken is really to test the issue which is common to both sides. I repeat, the conservationists are saying - and I accept the integrity with which they are putting their position - they say, don't paint us as not having a concern for jobs. Don't paint us as saying we are not concerned with peoples' employment. They are saying that they believe that without proceeding, and certainly without proceeding at this point, into National Estate areas there are adequate viable and prudent alternatives. What the decision of the Cabinet provides is a process of testing that.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, if logging does start in either the Lemonthyme or Southern Forests area, how effective a blocking measure can the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act be?

PM: We believe that it does provide power to the Commonwealth. Obviously, in the division of powers that exists between the Executive and the Parliament, and the judiciary, we do not have the final right to determine what that power is. We believe the power exists, but ultimately it is a matter which may be tested in the High Court.

JOURNALIST: Mr Cohen, are you disappointed you were unable to announce today no logging no matter what?

COHEN: I'm delighted with the decision Cabinet's made.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, do you think a similar inquiry process would be appropriate to resolve the question of new mining in Kakadu Stage III?

PM: We'll be dealing with the question of Stage III in the Cabinet tomorrow. Cabinet will be making its decision there, and it's my judgment we'll be making an appropriate decision in those circumstances.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, is it unlikely the Tasmanian Government will co-operate?

PM: I hope not. We sought, when we first came to government in regard to the dam, to get co-operation. It wasn't forthcoming. I would hope the Government and the people of Tasmania would see from the events there that this is a government which seeks to get resolutions by way of co-operation. We believe there is a way through by co-operation. So I hope that arises. I'm not here to be seen as waving big sticks. It ought to be established now, after about four years in government, that's not my way of doing things or the way of my government.

JOURNALIST: How much longer will this decision allow logging in Jackeys Marsh and particularly if there is any inclination to continue logging next year, would the Government also invoke the World Heritage ... Conservation Act as you suggest ...?

PM: No, as we understand it now and as we are given to understand from some discussions with some representatives of the conservation movement there is a clear understanding that this season's operations in Jackey's Marsh are virtually completed. There is not very long to go and the conservation movement, as we have spoken to them, accepts the reality that it can be completed. But the decision takes the view that in the general review that will emerge from these processes it is appropriate for the question of alternatives, feasible and prudent resources to be applied to the consideration of Jackey's Marsh. But as to the application of the World Heritage protection mechanism, it is identified as being appropriate to the two areas of the National Estate, that is Lemonthyme and the Southern Forest.

JOURNALIST: So you haven't got that off the agenda with Jackey's Marsh?

PM: Well, it is conceded I mean by all those involved that the same considerations do not apply to Jackey's Marsh and the Douglas River area.

COHEN: It is not considered. Even the conservation movement doesn't consider that Jackeys Marsh is of World Heritage status or Douglas River.

JOURNALIST: Are you prepared to take these two areas to the World Heritage courts to protect them?

PM: Well, I made it clear in an earlier answer that in one way or another it is quite possible that you will get to the High Court on this issue. What we have made clear in our decision that we are prepared to use those powers that we believe do exist under that legislation. Now, as I say in one way or another that may be tested. But we think it is an appropriate head of power.

JOURNALIST: What will you do if Mr Gray moves into those areas next week and starts logging?

PM: Well, quite clearly the decision is unequivocal. We say that we would oppose that and then it would be up to us to use our powers. That would presumably and obviously have to be advised by our legal advisers but in those circumstances you would seek an injunction seeking to use that power.

JOURNALIST: Mr Kerin, do you see this decision consistent with your role as Primary Industry Minister, that is the development of primary industry in this country?

KERIN: I think one thing you have to focus on Greg, is that what we are doing today is still giving the Memorandum of Understanding a chance to work. That was negotiated over six months and if the Tasmanian Government is prepared to look at this whole question of prudent and feasible alternatives we still

maintain the position of trying to get a balance between environment and jobs which is what the basic decision was. Today is actually the anniversary of the Cabinet decision we took a year ago. So the same things are on the board. We want to give the MOU a chance to work. It is all about a balance between environment and jobs. And that is the way it has always been. What we want to do here is test the prudent and feasible alternative and/or sequencing of forestry operations.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, in the Parliament you gave an unequivocal guarantee that the Government would fight Peko-Wallsend in the court if it sought to exercise mining. Is your resolve as strong in this case as it was against Peko on the Kakadu issue?

PM: Of course our resolve is as strong. We have got a position in regard to the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth's powers up there which are different from the situation in regard to Tasmania.

JOURNALIST: Mr Kerin, have you got any idea in terms of the total area and volume that would constitute a feasible set of alternatives?

KERIN: Well, there's lots of figures around. If I can just give an example. The National Estate value on the Lemonthyme is the visual values from the World Heritage area adjacent. The Tasmanian Government wants to log about 40% of that area over 15 years. In terms of the size of those coops, in terms of the sequence of operations, what we would be looking at is areas that are available to the Tasmanian Forestry Commission whether or not that logging needs to go ahead now. And that is a perfectly reasonable, rational approach and I believe that if the Tasmanian Forestry Commission co-operates and gives us an idea of their logging proposals we may be able to get a more prudent and a more feasible alternative than what we have confronting us at present.

JOURNALIST: You have already had talks with Mr Groom. How hopeful are you that he will be co-operative this time?

KERIN: I had one conversation with Mr Groom today just out of courtesy to advise him of what had been vocadexed down to him. I hope to see him on Wednesday or Thursday this week, probably Thursday.

JOURNALIST: What was his response?

KERIN: He appreciated the courtesy of letting him know.

JOURNALIST: If at the beginning of next seasons logging they go back into Jackeys Marsh, what action are you prepared to take there? Is there any action?

PM: I am not going into hypotheticals. What I rest upon and what the Government rests upon is the decision and that is that we have attempted to set up a process of consultation and/or review. And the answer that I gave earlier and that John has given is valid. We hope to get that process of co-operation through the

consultation or review process to which they agree. I don't think anyone's interest is served by dealing with that hypothetical question. We have said that we believe that the realistic thing now, given that the committee has looked at Jackey's Marsh, is to allow this season's operations to finish. They are virtually finished now. But we believe it is appropriate to include Jackey's Marsh in that overall review process. Now that is our decision and no one's interest is served by becoming hypothetical about a years time.

JOURNALIST: Have the Tasmanian loggers got any option but to go into those areas? Is there enough areas outside ...?

PM: I would have thought that if there is one thing that is clear out of the decision we have taken that that is the precise question that is an issue and we are trying to set up a process for establishing that.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, it could be argued that if the National Estate is to be conserved that the cost of that preservation should be undertaken by the nation as a whole and not Tasmania alone. If possible alternatives are not an economic proposition for logging, does the Federal Government stand ready to weigh in with a subsidy to preserve the National Estate forests in Tasmania.

PM: Well, that question is both irrelevant and hypothetical at this stage because what we are doing is the same comment that I made before to the previous question is that we are about testing the question of the existence of adequate prudent alternatives. Now, quite clearly if the outcome of that inquiry is to show that there are then the question doesn't arise. And again no one's interests are served by addressing what at this stage must be by definition entirely a hypothetical question.

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