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## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE WITH THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, MR GERRY HAND, KATHERINE GORGE, THURSDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 1987

B & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, do you anticipate that Katherine Gorge will be returned to the Jawoyn tribe?

PM: We are awaiting the report of the Royal Commissioner, Kearney, and we will examine that. But we will take into account the interests of all concerned - that is the Aboriginal people. And I understand that earlier they had indicated that if the land were to go to them they would have been prepared to lease it back to the Northern Territory Government. I don't think there is any indication of desire on the part of the Aboriginal people concerned to want to deny access to the hundreds of thousands of visitors who want to come here. Nor would I believe there would be any substance in the suggestion that they would want to deny water to the people of Katherine who depend upon it as a source of supply. I am quite confident that when the report of the Royal Commission does become available we will be able to act on it in a way which will meet the legitimate interests of everybody concerned.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, on the question of the treaty. Last night the Secretary of your Department of Aboriginal Affairs said that compact isn't enough, that it has got to be a proper treaty.

PM: I heard what Mr Perkins said.

JOURNALIST: Will you take any action on it?

PM: Would I what?

JOURNALIST: Would you take any action, say any action against him?

PM: I don't want to take any action against him. I have got a Minister who has already proved himself an excellent Minister. He will handle anything that needs to be handled if there is anything that needs to be handled.

JOURNALIST: What Mr Perkins has drawn attention to, Mr Hawke, is that where you say you really are just talking about a form of words between a compact and a treaty. Mr Perkins draws a very clear and sharp difference between the two.

PM: There will be a lot of discussions go on and people like Mr Perkins will be able to have their input.

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JOURNALIST: Could we just go back over the point that I think you touched on in that interview earlier this morning. Do I understand you correctly as saying that if it really comes to a crunch that you would be prepared to accept a treaty as opposed to compact?

PM: I am simply saying at this stage the words don't mean anything. It is what you are in fact going to do and the attitude with which you are going to approach it. And if I felt that the sort of things that you needed to be achieving required a particular formulation or wording, I am simply saying I am not going to get hung up on the wording. But I don't think that we should be creating unreal expectations by using a word now which may have connotations that are inappropriate or undeliverable.

JOURNALIST: Connotations relating to any financial payback to Aborigines?

PM: Not just financial matters. I am really getting rather bored with the discussion. I made the point so clear that I am not going to get hung up on a word. I really am bored with the discussion about whether it is a treaty, compact or another word. What we have got to get on with is the discussion of the issues. I really am finding it boring.

JOURNALIST: But you must understand that there is some confusion over the terms that you have used, Prime Minister, that people aren't sure exactly what you are moving towards?

PM: They will have to read the transcript and they will see that the sorts of things that I have got in mind. I am not going to cloud the issue now by saying it must be something which is a treaty, it must be something which is a compact. That is nonsense. And I repeat, I find it boring.

JOURNALIST: Whatever it is going to be called, can you explain further the mechanism for putting this pact, or treaty, or compact of understanding in place.

PM: Mr Hand will be having discussions with representatives right throughout the Aboriginal community. And not just the Aboriginal community but I think it is more appropriate that you should ask Gerry just how he feels that he will be going about the process.

JOURNALIST: Do you like the idea the Prime Minister mentioned yesterday of the concept being in the preamble to legislation for the Commission of Aboriginal Affairs.

HAND: It is one of the options but let me repeat what he said. He said it could be a treaty, it could be a compact, it could be an agreement. And what we have to do is work out the best form of approach and we will do that through consultation. When we have the consultations we will be in a better position to tell everybody what is in it.

JOURNALIST: What are the options then, the other options?

HAND: There are a lot of options and when we have those

HAND cont: consultations with the people that are going to affected by it, in the main, we will be in a better position to tell you and everybody else.

JOURNALIST: Was this announcement, in that event, a little premature?

HAND: Of course not. Why shouldn't you let people know the direction you are going in. And that is what we have done.

JOURNALIST: Because you have immediately got a potential backlash and conflict which might otherwise have been avoided prior -

PM: That means you do not do anything or say anything. That is not the way we operate.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hand, the Aboriginal people, some of them for quite a long period of time have been talking about a makerrata which is a sort of a concept of a treaty which would actually talk about sovereignty - aboriginal sovereignty and prior ownership rights - are you at this stage prepared to look at anything towards that?

HAND: There has been a lot of things written on the issue and there are briefing papers about 2 foot high on it. And it is one of the things that will be taken into consideration. That was the result of a few years ago and when we have those consultations, as I said, we will then come forward -

JOURNALIST: ... an indication whether your consultations would go ... that that would be something that was still an option?

HAND: That is one of the things that Aboriginal people have put forward themselves. So obviously when we are talking to them I am sure some of them will put it forward again. But it will be taken into consideration.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, can I just ask one more question about the Gorge. Do you envisage, if the report recommends, as most people anticipate, that the application be granted, that a similar process will apply here as applies at Ayres Rock, on a leaseback arrangement.

PM: All I was saying on that is that according to the information I have been given that early in the piece that proposition was advanced by the representatives of the Aboriginal people. I am simply saying that I have no doubt at all that we will be able to reach an arrangement whereby the legitimate interests and concerns of everybody involved will be met. I really do find it fascinating in politics how much time is spent by the media in advancing an issue, saying what about this problem, what that problem, what about this problem, what about that problem. You seem to spend so much of your life imagining problems that are going to arise. And it is very interesting and probably productive for you - it fills in time - but is so very rarely relevant to how things work out.

JOURNALIST: There are some tensions, no matter how badly based here, about that issue. I thought perhaps some of the people might like to know what is going happen when the Gorge is handed to them?

PM: It doesn't make sense. It is not the way I govern, run the country, with my Ministers, to say there has been an inquiry set up but before we get the report we will say this is what is going to happen. That is not a sensible way to conduct affairs.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, on a more positive note, what practical difference -

PM: I wasn't thinking we had been on other than a positive note -

JOURNALIST: What practical difference will a compact make to Aboriginal Australians for next year?

PM: Again it goes back to the point that I and Gerry have been making. It depends, to some extent, on not just what is in the whatever we call it - treaty, compact - but I get back to the point that it will depend very much upon the attitudes that surround the arrival at that arrangement - whatever it is. I keep getting back to the point that I want to see the people of Australia - the Aborigines and the non-Aborigines - have a more positive understanding of the relationship of our 200 years of history to the previous 40,000 years. And it is the attitude that in many senses that is going to be more important than what is contained in the compact or call it what you will. And I don't find it useful to be contemplating at this stage, suggesting what particular provisions, clauses words, are going to be in this arrangement. I don't think that helps anyone. It is important that what we have flagged is that we are about the process of consultation between the representatives of the Aborigines in this country and the Government and the community generally to try and get a better basis of understanding. And that is the important thing.

JOURNALIST: Will you consider any sort of financial or property compensation for the Aboriginal -

PM: I have answered that sort of question. And it really is pointless to be going and saying this is what we will do, this is what we won't do. Consultation is about addressing the issues, hearing what people have got to say. I have got no doubt that suggestions in that area will arise. And Gerry has made it quite clear that he is going to be listening to whatever people have to say.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hand, has anyone yet solved the problem of claims over stock routes in the Northern Territory?

HAND: No, we start a process on Friday, I am sorry we commenced a few weeks back when we came and met the government, the pastoralists and the land councils - separately - and we got them to agree to a joint meeting on Friday. We will be having that and we are confident that we will solve that problem. But we will do it slowly and together. Just as we will approach

HAND cont: a lot of the problems, all of the problems, in the future. Quietly and slowly and we will solve them all.

JOURNALIST: Are you getting the sort of co-operation you want from the Northern Territory Government.

HAND: I have had tremendous co-operation from the 3 parties. And I would hope that that is going to continue. I have got no doubt that it will.

JOURNALIST: They are all going to be together tomorrow. Are you anticipating a few fights.

HAND: No. Everybody is going to be very relaxed I am told because we are all out to fix up the problem. And I think there is a realisation now that everything is going to go on the table tomorrow afternoon. And everybody will now where everybody else stands. And then we will set about settling the issue.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister on the question of states moving towards some sort of land rights legislation. Do you have a timetable for that - given 1988 is the year -

PM: No, not a timetable. Gerry is going to be meeting, in this next week, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. And I don't think you help by saying there is a timetable. It is not the way we do things. If you say there is a timetable you are putting constraints on the way people act. Obviously, we would like to see things settled as soon as possible. But I don't think time is the essence of it.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, what would you say quite a few white Australians who feel threatened by the concept of aboriginal land rights or aboriginal sovereignty or making any sort of pact or treaty. How would you explain your position to them?

PM: I would urge them to be calm, to think, not be overcome by emotional propaganda. When I see some of the sorts of things that have been said, advertised over the past few years, it just makes you despair a little bit. You should remember some of the campaigns in Western Australia - maps that were presented with 90% or 95% of the state of Western Australia coloured in black. I just ask people to be rational and calm and to understand that it is possible, quite possible, to recognise the concerns and rights of the Aboriginal people and still to do it in a way which is going to impose no threat whatsoever to the legitimate interests of the European population.

JOURNALIST: You suggested a while back that Australians weren't compassionate enough to deal with these sorts of issues. Do you think things have changed?

PM: Let's be accurate in what I said. What I said was that in 1967 it was quite a remarkable decision that was made by the Australian people - given their history in regard to the passage of referenda, or non-passage of referenda. By

PM cont: an overwhelming majority they decided that legislative power should be given to the federal parliament in regard to aboriginal affairs. What I said was that it does appear that in the period since then, as tougher economic circumstances emerged, that the Australian community didn't seem to be so compassionate and concerned as it had been in those perhaps more halcyon full employment days. I think that is simply a statement of fact. It doesn't mean, and I didn't say it, that the Australian people didn't have compassion. I was just saying I think it is observable that when you get into tougher economic circumstances - that is not full employment - people perhaps tend to centre in upon themselves a little bit more than they do in earlier days. I think it is just a question of responsibility of government, governments, community organisations, and individuals to understand that we can discharge the obligations we have to less fortunate members of our society. And do it in a way which doesn't diminish, but properly looked at, enhances the whole of the community, I think.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, just one final thing -

PM: Okay.

JOURNALIST: Without wanting to pre-empt Justice Kearney's report would your Government consider imposing conditions on any possible future ownerships such as relating to water or management?

PM: What I am saying is that we will require that the interests, the legitimate interests, of everyone involved have to be taken into account. You can meet the interests of people in a number of ways. You can do it simply by negotiation without imposing things on people. You can just, out of the process of negotiation, you can get a recognition of those interests. But whatever way it is done there will be a recognition of everybody's interests.

JOURNALIST: Can Aborigines look forward to a maintained or increased level of funding in the bicentennial year?

PM: I think so. I certainly anticipate, on the record of this government, at least a maintained level.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, at a local level, for the local press, was the principal of St Joseph's College, who I believe lobbied you rather heavily last night -

PM: Is that Sister Patricia? She's a great advocate.

JOURNALIST: - Did her pleas fall on deaf ears totally or

PM: No politician worth his salt has deaf ears. I was impressed by what she had to say and I will certainly be talking with not just the Minister for Education but we want to be sure that there is going to be here in Katherine the educational facilities to cope with what is, for it, a very significant increase in population. We have got to make sure that those facilities are there. So I will be discussing these matters with the relevant Ministers and I will try and ensure that the facilities are there. It is not just the Commonwealth

PM cont: involved. It is the Northern Territory Government. But what is happening here with the ... (break in tape) ... it is very important for the whole of Australia. It is a pivotal part of the new forward defensive structure of the country. And because that is so we can't ask one small community to bear, entirely itself, a burden ... development for the whole country. So we will look at it. I can't imagine that these sort of things haven't been taken into account. But following my visit here I will certainly have discussions to see what the picture is. If there is more that needs to be done, we will try and do it.

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