



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, PRINCE OF WALES BAY, HOBART,
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JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, the Directors of International Catamaran Services asked you for a fair hearing I suppose on the fuel excise rebate?

PM: They have raised the matter with me and they have left me with a submission. I'll have a look at it. I didn't make them any promises other than that I would read very carefully their submission.

JOURNALIST: Do they have a valid argument?

PM: They certainly think they have and I've got no more to say than that I've promised them that I will very carefully read their submission. They're obviously an enterprise which deserves the consideration of anything they've put to you because they've shown that they are a remarkable enterprise. I'm very proud of them.

JOURNALIST: Do you think a development such as the tourist ferry on Bass Strait is good for tourism in Australia?

PM: Yes, it's obviously going to be beneficial both in terms of increased speed, lower cost and what's exciting for me about it is not just the service they are providing here across the Bass Strait but the demonstration that they've already given of their capacity to establish an enormous export market. I mean they have got orders now for ferries in the Irish Sea and all over the place, so they've got something here which at this stage is unique in the world. There's no-one else like it and so I just have nothing but praise for them and wish them well.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, the front page of the Australian said today that ALP strategists were talking about a September election.

PM: Were they? They haven't talked to me about it. I mean, I'll probably have something to do with it.

JOURNALIST: Does it interest you, that date?

PM: Look, I've got nothing to add to what I've said, and I haven't been coy about it, the election will be held somewhere from the latter part of this year up until May of next year. Now I haven't been playing funny fellows with that, it'll be in there sometime - and when we have it, we'll win.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, for the second time you've held out the hope that pensioners, that they think they might be better off come the next poll. Can you elaborate on that hint a bit?

PM: Yes, what I can say is this. Let me make it clear, we are not responding to some suggested grey power or anything like that. I not only reject that suggestion but find it offensive because I established with Brian Howe some couple of years ago now, an expert inquiry under Professor Bettina Cass. She brought down a very very considered and relevant report on retirement incomes. So what we did then was to establish, under Brian Howe and officials, a consultative force which is talking with pensioner organisations and with the superannuation industry. In addition to that I established a backbench committee which is going around the country listening to individual pensioners and groups of them. Now that's been underway for a very very long period of time and all I can say is that in the relatively near future I'll be receiving the reports from those two groups and out of our consideration of those reports certain advances will be made which will add to the very proud record we have in this area. I remind you the time has come in which the Australian community can compare and contrast the records of the conservatives and Labor over a similar period of time. Under the conservatives the real value of the pension declined by that 2 1/2 percent and my Government, it's increased by 7.7 percent. The period when Mr Howard was Treasurer, real decline in the value of pensions, 4.1 percent, up 7.7 percent under us and we are going to do more and they are going to talk.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, if we could just switch to the Wesley Vale pulp mill. What concerns did the State branch of the Labor Party raise with you this morning?

PM: Obvious ones, obvious ones about the environment and I listened with interest to what they've got to say and what they are putting will be part of the whole matrix of consideration that we take into account when the decision of the Tasmanian Parliament comes to us.

JOURNALIST: Was the discussed?

PM: No.

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