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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LYNEHAM, 7.30 REPORT
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E & O E - PROOF ONLY

LYNEHAM: Welcome to the program.

PM: Thank you Paul.

LYNEHAM: You all agreed at today's conference that there was no quick fix to the housing problem. The thing is that's what many families need isn't it?

PM: Yes well you can't give a quick fix. What we've done, it's a unique thing for the Commonwealth to involve itself in the housing scene in the way we did today and I think that was acknowledged because basically these things are a State responsibility on the supply side. But we just felt that we had to move in.

LYNEHAM: There has been a bit of whingeing about the land you have offered. Nick Greiner said some of it is subject to flooding and some of it is part of an airport and so on.

PM: I must say however in fairness to Nick he might be saying it outside but he was very cooperative in there. We said to the States if you can identify parcels of Commonwealth land which we haven't included which you think from your point of view may be better, let's talk about that.

LYNEHAM: Wouldn't it come onto the market quicker if you gave it to private enterprise?

PM: Not necessarily but what we've said is we'd like to talk with the States and if they're not interested in particular parts well then of course we'll go to the private sector. I think it may involve a mix.

LYNEHAM: Are we inevitably moving away from the Australia of the quarter acre block and the Hills Hoist?

PM: No, I don't think in terms of people who want that, that we will be moving away from it. But in fairness to Paul I don't think the point he was making was really -

LYNEHAM: He got a bit of a caning for it didn't he?

PM: Yes, and I think it was a bit unfair to him because he uses language quickly to make a point and I don't think people understood that what Paul was really saying and what our position is, that for those who still want and see the advantages in having the quarter acre block with a hoist and all that goes with it, beauty. I mean, that still will be what perhaps a great majority will do. But it clearly is the case Paul that the preferences of a lot of people would be to have medium density housing in not only the inner cities but in other areas which would have them closer to their place of employment with a whole lot of advantages which they would put over the concept of the quarter acre block. But for those who still aspire to that, that's the way it will be.

LYNEHAM: The Saulwick poll this morning had Labor four points behind the Coalition across the nation, but ten points behind in Sydney. Is that the housing crisis?

PM: I think it may be something to do with that. I just frankly am a little bit sceptical about the extent of change in a relatively short period, I think there's a bit of an overstatement there. But in other things in Sydney, I think in Sydney -

LYNEHAM: (inaudible)

PM: That's partly, but I think also as far as the media is concerned I must say that the concentration of talkback radio is a phenomenon in Sydney, it's got something to do with it. I think we get a bit of a belting on talkback radio, I think that's got something to do with it.

LYNEHAM: Are you going to do more talkback radio then to counter this?

PM: Yes, I've already started.

LYNEHAM: The Saulwick poll also suggested that the Coalition has a 5% lead among women over Labor, the gender gap, you identified it at the recent ministry meeting. Where does it come from, what's going wrong?

PM: I think we have to accept a good deal of responsibility. I think there hasn't been the success in communication of what we've done for women obviously that there should have been, because it's conceded in the organisations of women that there's no government that has done as much for women as we have. It's clear that we haven't communicated to women, I think, as well as we should. Why they should view this Government with failure, ... that communication will be made in the period between now and the next election.

LYNEHAM: Someone has said to me that it's a bit patronising to sort of sharpen up your approach to women with an election just over the horizon.

PM: It's not intended to be patronising, I can assure women of that. It's simply a concession, an admission if you like of some fault on our part. When you've done as much in the area of importance to women as we have done and where we've created as I want to point out to the women of Australia most importantly, not just for them but for their daughters, the Australia that we have created will be one in which their daughters will grow up with a much broader range of opportunities than girls have ever had before. Now if we haven't got that across as we clearly haven't sufficiently well, then we would be silly if we didn't understand it and take steps to get the message across. I can assure you there's no patronising, it's a whack behind the ear for ourselves. We haven't done as well as we should have with communication.

LYNEHAM: This extraordinary rumpus within the NSW branch over the Liverpool preselection there. In the Supreme Court there today you had a demo outside the branch office, the head office. Does this warrant Federal intervention?

PM: Well, it's not very elegant, I don't like it but let me say this. If I had to take my choice between the internal condition of Labor and the coalition, I go for Labor every time. Sure it's not elegant, not pleasant that particular issue you talk about in NSW but how would you like the situation in the Liberal Party and with the National Party. I mean, brawling now, brawling now in Victoria, as to whether they're going to have a joint coalition ticket for the Senate. The fights that are going on within the Liberal Party and within the National Party, look I prefer to have no dispute, no problem at all in the Labor Party, I don't like what's happening there -

LYNEHAM: How are you going to get rid of this problem?

PM: Well it's not my responsibility. It's a matter for the State organisation in NSW.

LYNEHAM: It's damaging federally isn't it?

PM: I don't think it's damaging federally, but obviously nothing is helpful politically which reflects some problem within your show and that's true for the Liberals, true for the Nationals, true for us. I'd rather it hadn't happened.

LYNEHAM: Clyde Holding says he is going to stand again for Melbourne Ports at next election. Some members of Caucus think he should think seriously about standing aside in the interests of allowing some new blood in. Is there any validity -

PM: Into the Parliament or into the Ministry?

LYNEHAM: Into the Parliament.

PM: Well, I'd seen somewhere It hasn't been put to me. Clyde obviously is well known in that electorate and well respected I think he feels. I can understand that feeling that he's got the best chance of maximising the vote.

LYNEHAM: Do you think he has?

PM: I would think he has. I mean he is well known, I think he's represented the electorate well.

LYNEHAM: Does Gerry Hand have your unqualified confidence?

PM: Yes. I think that Gerry, more than any Minister that I can recall in this very very delicate, difficult portfolio, has shown these characteristics Paul. Absolute commitment. I don't think there is anyone, including on the Opposition, who questions his commitment, a sensitivity. I mean I can't recall anyone who has gone to so much trouble to travel all over Australia to visit wide range of Aboriginal communities to listen. Listening is hard in politics. Not many people are good at it. Gerry Hand is. He has vision and he's also, importantly he's got toughness and people have tried to generate some sort of signer about Gerry that he's soft, that he's a soft touch for the Aborigines. He's not. He can be as tough as nails when he sees something that he doesn't believe is right.

LYNEHAM: Do you agree with Kevin Gosper that the Senate Drugs in Sport Inquiry has damaged the international reputation of Australian sport?

PM: I can't make a judgement about that. I respect Kevin Gosper very very much. He's not only a fine athlete but he's an enormously committed sports administrator. If Kevin makes that judgement I would be loathe to dispute it.

LYNEHAM: Finally, how does it really feel to be Knight Special Class of the Most Exulted Order of the White Elephant?

PM: I suppose because of the easy shot at the writers for cartoonists and others the White Elephant Order, one may have hoped there was another name for it, but having said that, I just do point out Paul for your listeners it is the highest order capable of being awarded by the Thai leadership to any foreigner. To that extent I take it not only personally, but for this country as a very high honour.

LYNEHAM: Sir Elephant, thanks for your time.

PM: Thank you very much.

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