



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, REDCLIFFE CITY BOWLS CLUB, 16
MARCH 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: inaudible

PM: Well they are at the lower end of the range of expectations so to that extent I'm pleased. But there's no room for complacency. The export figure's flat, the import figures are down and we certainly want to see the import figures down. But this I think means that the Government needs to continue the firm policies that it's pursuing now. That is we need to get the level of activity down somewhat so that we are not sucking in an unacceptably high level of imports. We have a better opportunity now with the dollar down from the higher figures it's reached to help those of our manufacturers and exporters who want to get in to the markets overseas and to compete against imports. We are better poised now for those purposes than we were some months back. So overall I'm pleased that it is at the lower end of expectations but not complacent.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke though is it a bit deceptively low because February is such a short month?

PM: The figures are taken into account in the seasonally adjusted sense and I think that what I've said is accurate.

JOURNALIST: What do you think it means for home loan interest rates?

PM: I've got no reason to change what I've said before. Now firstly I don't go predicting in the immediate sense - and I never have predicted in immediate terms - what will happen to interest rates because that's not helpful to anyone. I simply repeat what I've said before and that is that I think that we've got the policies in place which will mean that as time goes on in this year we can look at a lowering of the interest rates structure but I'm not predicting anything for the immediate future.

JOURNALIST: It probably won't be much incentive for the share market do you think?

PM: You are a pessimist aren't you. Have you got anything nice to say? The share market conducts its own business. I'm not here to prod it up or push it down. That's for the market, they make their own judgement.

JOURNALIST: inaudible

PM: Well consumer confidence I think to the extent that this has any impact, it must be a bit of a plus because it has - as I repeat - come in at the lower end of the range of expectations. So if it has any impact upon consumer confidence it must presumably be a bit of a plus.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke what's your response to Mr Crean's condemnation of the Federal Government saying it lacks an overall environment strategy?

PM: I think that Simon has been somewhat harsh in his observations. I think if he had seen in detail what we saw - that is the report of the CSIRO and the Bureau of Rural Resources reports - then he would understand that there was no alternative than the decision that we took because those reports made it quite clear that it would've been an ... of any governments' duty to allow the Mill to proceed on the watered down terms that had been agreed to by the Tasmanian Government. It was an act of political irresponsibility by the Gray Government that all that time they did not insist upon an effective environmental impact study and at the end they gave in to commercial pressures from the joint venturers. Our position is that we would like investment in this country. We'd like a mill but I say Mr Gray, I say to the people of Australia, while we want growth and investment we don't want it at any price. We have a responsibility to this and future generations of Australians to protect the environment as well as encouraging growth and this Government's got a good record in terms of growth. We've created jobs in this country four times faster than our conservative predecessors. We're creating jobs in this country more than twice as fast as the rest of the industrialised world. So we've got nothing to apologise to anyone in terms of growth. But as I say I'm not a growth-at-any-price man. I've got a responsibility and my colleagues have got a responsibility to this generation of Australians and future generations and I'm not going to be remiss in discharging that responsibility.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister do you share Senator Richardson's assessment that Mr Crean has done his political future some damage by his outburst yesterday?

PM: No I am not going to that point. I think that's drawing a somewhat long bow.

JOURNALIST: Do you think it was unwise of him to make those comments?

PM: I'm not making any comments about that.

JOURNALIST: Is the conservation policy then on track?

PM: Let me say this, that I would believe that if you look at our record in the area of conservation we have a prouder record than any government before us. I don't need to go over it all, but you look at the Great Barrier Reef, the forests in Queensland and Tasmania, Kakadu, all the areas of achievement, they stand out and warrant the judgements that's been made by the international community that no government has been more responsibly committed to the preservation of the environment than has my Government. Obviously when you make decisions in this area you have to walk fine lines. This country needs investment, it needs a situation where our natural products can be processed with more value added and we want to see that happen. But I repeat we're not going to do that at any price because of the responsibilities to which I refer. I think our process is on track. We're establishing the Resources Assessment Commission so that in future those who want to have developmental projects will have an Authority established under Commonwealth law which will enable those who want to argue their case and those who feel that there are ... concerns to be able to develop their points before a well known established tribunal so that there will be this process through which they can go and which will be well known. So if you take all those things into account I think we can say yes it is on track.

JOURNALIST: Is there any need for an overall environment strategy though?

PM: You can't have an overall environment strategy which says for every conceivable type of project here is the strategy. I mean that doesn't make sense. What you've got to have is a mechanism which I've referred to, we've established now the Resources Assessment Tribunal to which I've referred and that will give a degree of certainty of process for everybody.

ends