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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MEREDITH CAMPBELL, ABC RADIO
SAL, ALICE SPRINGS

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JOURNALIST: an overnighiter in Alice Springs, one in Darwin and a major commitment in between in Katherine, now time to go out and experience the rigours of the Olgas Road.

PM: Well I suppose I ought to do that now if I'm going to do it because it's going to be the decision that I have announced to make all that money available to fix the road and it's not going to be like that for much longer.

Journalist: And you say the construction may start before the end of this financial year?

PM: I believe so, I hope so. We think we can do the planning and the discussions with the community fairly quickly and we certainly want to see it underway as quickly as possible.

Journalist: Well it seemed yesterday morning on this program the Northern Territory Minister for Tourism seemed to be completely in the dark about the proposal.

PM: Well if you conduct yourself by just getting up and making noises and not talking to people and finding out what is happening locally you will find yourself in the dark, but that is a pretty perpetual condition for our political opponents federally as well as in this area.

Journalist: Considering that there will be a major commitment, a contribution of funds to the project from the Northern Territory Government don't you think that there should have been a bit more communication at that point?

PM: Well, I don't think the decision will come in total surprise to those that really need to know. And they will I am sure make the relatively small contribution that we are asking for so that there will be a total outlay of funds of over \$8 million which will see the road sealed and upgraded and providing the sort of facility that the increasing demand of tourism is making upon us.

Journalist: Has Mr Poole contacted you to commend your announcement?

PM: Well I haven't had any message from him. I don't know whether he has spoken, none of my people have said they have had contact from him.

Journalist: Given the timetable, does that mean there will be time to conduct negotiations or consultations with the traditional owners of Uluru of the site location of the road.

PM: I believe so ... of this case. Yes.

Journalist: On to matters of defence, obviously your visit to the Northern Territory is defence related and the Tindal Air Base will represent a major resolution of this Government to direct defence energies to the defence of the north. In Alice Springs an ongoing issue remains the operations of the Pine Gap Defence Base here in Alice Springs which has a strategic role in defence of the world, if you like, and last night you were served with a subpoena to appear in Alice Springs court in August on behalf of a gentleman called Mr Lenin Limbo who was charged with trespass at the major demonstration at the Gap in 1987. Will you appear?

PM: I doubt it.

Journalist: Will you send a representative?

PM: Oh look I am not talking about that. I will hand over the document to my advisers. I mean in the whole scheme of things that very important things in this country, that will rate - if there are 16 pages of the agenda that will be somewhere near the bottom of page 16.

Journalist: Not a serious move at all?

PM: Well, I have answered the question haven't I?

Journalist: Just a stunt?

PM: I am not concerned to have a go at Mr Limbo, I am just saying that if there are 16 pages, detailed pages on my agenda, if it appears it will be at the bottom of page 16. I mean there really are many, many more important things to talk about and a relatively limited amount of time I would have thought.

Journalist: Yes indeed, and considering that Pine Gap should be a source of pride to all Australians why is it the case that negotiations to continue arrangements for its presence in Australia are they conducted in such secrecy?

PM: There has never been more openness about Pine Gap than under my Government. I made now two major statements in the Parliament about it, the people are better informed now than they ever been before about the purposes and functions of Pine Gap and the other joint facilities that we have in this country. Just put very very simply it is indisputably the case that Australia and in this latter period Australia under my Government had not had this cooperation, then we would not as a world be able to say as we can with confidence now that there is greater hope for a peaceful world in the future now than there ever has been before, because these joint facilities have ensured that the concept of mutual deterrence has been able to operate effectively, it has brought the two super powers to the negotiating table and the nonsense that is put by some of the opponents that the fact of hope in these joint facilities made it difficult for Australia to play some part in these processes and negotiations demonstrated by the fact that now over 12 months ago I was able to be in the Soviet Union, personally had over three and a half hours with Mr Gorbachev, talked in detail with him about issues of East/West cooperation of the processes that are underway to bring about the elimination of total classes of nuclear weapons and no one was able more than I was to have that sort of lengthy discussion with Mr Gorbachev. So it destroys the nonsense that is put by the opponents that because we are host to these joint facilities we are somehow compromised and limited in our capacity to make a very significant contribution to the processes of peace. The very opposite is the truth.

Journalist: Mr Hawke, let's get on to matters of domestic relations. The compact or the treaty, the word is unimportant, any idea of the timetable of the commitment on that?

PM: When I was in Alice Springs in 1987 when I first raised the concept, I said then and my timing was quite intentional. as we were coming into the Bicentennial year, I said that I hoped that it may be possible to complete these processes in the lifetime of this Parliament but I wasn't necessarily wedded to that. And I don't think we will be able to finalise it in the life of this Parliament and that represents the fact that the Aboriginal people themselves plus the Australian community as a whole, I think want a fair bit of time to discuss these issues to see exactly what it is that they want covered in such a treaty or compact or whatever we call it. So I think the more realistic timetable, Meredith, is that we will see that completed in the next Parliament but with very substantial progress being made in the lifetime of this Parliament.

Journalist: Is the resolution of the compact or treaty one way to rid ourselves of the conflict, guilt and paranoia that has existed about relations between Aborigines and non-Aborigines?

PM: Yes, I think so Meredith. I want to repeat to your listeners, and may I preface my comment by saying how much I have appreciated the way in which within the Northern Territory there does seem to be now a much more mature approach on everyone's part. For instance, you were there last night and you saw there was a pretty wide cross section of the Northern Territory community. And you saw the reaction and as I walked around afterwards I met with a whole range of people and there was no antagonism to the things I had been seeing. So I do pay tribute to what I think is an increasingly mature and intelligent approach to this issue. What I said last night is that there was no reason at all for Australians to have some sense of collective national guilt on this issue. That doesn't do anyone any good. It is rather a rational, cold rational understanding of the fact that over the two hundred years of European settlement in Australia there have been injustices no reasonable person denies that, so it is simply acknowledging that and saying well it is to the benefit of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters as well as to the benefit of all of us in Australia that we don't dwell with a sense of guilt on the past, recognise injustices and undertake to one another that we are going to work together for an Australia in which all people are going to be able to live together equally as Australians. And let me make this point, our political opponents with a totality of opportunism and with an absence of principle have characterised what I am talking about here as creating two Australias. Nothing could be further from the truth. What it is about is to make one Australia, and one Australia stronger so that our Aboriginal citizens will understand that we recognise the wrongs of the past and accept a commitment to create an Australia in which irrespective of background people are going to have equality of opportunity. On the part of the Aborigines themselves they are going to say well this is the case we understand that this is the commitment of the whole of Australia. That makes a stronger Australia if we don't then be burdened with various senses as you say of paranoia, guilt and so on. We have faced up to the issues, the indisputable fact that injustices have been done. We are intelligent and mature enough to say, yes, that is right, but we are going to do all we can together to make sure that those injustices are rectified and the quality of opportunity is created. Now that is just a very sensible, adult and mature way of doing things and creating a much more unified, united, strong, single Australia.

Journalist: How has the experience of the Bicentennial helped us shed our guilt and paranoia?

PM: I think to some extent, let me be precise about that. There was an enormous amount of apprehension expressed you will recall as we came up to the 26 January in Sydney when we were going to have the great celebrations there which I think will remain in everyone's memory as one of the outstanding days of the century of our history as a nation. Now people were saying the Aborigines were going to be there and they were going to carry on, demonstrate, muck everything up. Well nothing could have been further from the truth and it reflected enormous credit from the people that stated rightly and understandably wanted people to know their issues and their concern. They were there, but they conducted themselves very responsibly and I say I was spoken to by representatives of the police and they couldn't have been more fullsome in their praise of the responsible way in which the Aboriginal people conducted themselves and I think that that, right from the start of Bicentennial 1988 set a good tone. In other words, perfectly legitimate to expect the Aboriginal people to ask us to remember their position as we remember two hundred years of European settlement. And so I think as the year went on it did have the result of making us all, Aborigines and non-Aborigines; understand the importance of 1988, but understanding the importance of 1988 in the stream of 40,000 years of history.

Journalist: Mr Hawke, 2001 a Statehood Odyssey. Bob Collins is keen on it, what is your view?

PM: Well, on the question of describing various ways, you know statehood or whatever you want to describe it. I have simply said there to your Chief Minister when he came to see me about it a few weeks ago that this is something really that we have got to see the people of the Northern Territory, the people, not just the politicians, but the people indicating that this is really what they want. And I doubt very much whether at this stage that is the case. I haven't got any evidence that overwhelmingly Northern Territorians want to assume rather not merely rights that can be seen as involved in statehood, but obligations. And I must say quite honestly that if I was Territorian I don't know that I would be jumping up and down wanting statehood tomorrow. And I don't see any evidence of that. But if that position develops and it can be demonstrated to us that that is the wishes of the people of the Northern Territory then we would have to be beginning to look at it. You have to recognise of course that with the relatively small population of the Northern Territory it would be very difficult to talk about the equivalents of statehood in terms of numbers of Senators in a Federal Parliament and so on. And lots of practical difficulties but as I say I don't discern any popular clamour for it. And if there is evidence brought before us that that is something they want us to look at well then let's deal with it at that point. I think that is some way down the track though.

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Journalist: Has Mr Perron communicated evidence of this popular clamour?

PM: No, I think in fairness to the Chief Minister he wasn't asserting to me that that was the position.

Journalist: How does Mr Collins assert the position, sorry Senator Collins assert the position to you?

PM: I think similarly that Bob wouldn't be saying that this is something that is on everyone's lips at the moment.

Journalist: Senator Collins, is he in line for a ministry?

PM: Senator Collins would not be expecting that he would be a candidate to fill the immediate vacancy but I have had the opportunity just of saying very recently that in terms of both Bob Collins and Warren Snowdon you have people with outstanding capacity. They have made, I am not merely saying this because I know they would like to hear it, but it is reinforced by the reaction I get when I come up here and see the way in which right across the political spectrum the two of them are so widely regarded and respected and made an enormous contribution not merely in terms of representing the interests of the Northern Territory, but when they speak in the Caucus or in the Parliament they are listened to. So the answer is that both Bob Collins and Warren Snowdon are of ministerial timber. Their time will come, it is not immediate, not in the terms of this immediate vacancy, but their time will come.

Journalist: Some recent events have indicated that the hard edge of politics has been bruising you somewhat. Do you long for a less confrontational life?

PM: Well I don't regard politics as terribly confrontational. I mean I think when the history books are written I think they will say that Hawke made a significant contribution in trying to bring about consensus politics rather than confrontationist politics. I certainly hope that is the case. I don't feel bruised at all by it, I am enjoying politics now more than I ever have because, in part Meredith, after six years in office you have the great joy of seeing what were originally concepts and ideas coming to fruition. And that is enormously stimulating and rewarding, so I don't feel bruised. The only thing that one gets as time goes on is the realisation that there really isn't any privacy, any private life, you miss that somewhat but the compensations are just so overwhelming, so I am enjoying politics, I am enjoying the Prime Ministership more than I ever have.

Journalist: Will you lead the Parliamentary Labor Party beyond the next election?

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PM: Oh yes I will lead them in to the next election, I think we will win it and I will lead the Party through that next term and then we will just let's see how things turn out then. But I feel a vibrantly young and fit 59.

Journalist: How would a person who has led an often controversial and flamboyant public life, plan to spend a retirement?

PM: Well, perhaps less flamboyantly and less demandingly but I can't imagine any period in my life in which I won't be active. There are a lot of things I want to do when that time comes including, may I say, it is not one of sharing the lust of retired politicians to put pen to paper and write a book. Now that could come at some time but I don't have any passion about that. I rather would like as I have said before to have the opportunity of doing a series of television interviews with people I have met around the world and in Australia who I think have influenced the world in which they live. Influenced it for the better. I have had a very unique opportunity now amongst Australians of being exposed to these sort of people, I have been able to establish close rapport and understanding with many of them. I would love the opportunity of just sharing with millions of people not only in Australia but around the world the understanding I have of these people and getting through the opportunities at such interviews, the capacity for ordinary Australians and others to see the impact of individuals have been able to have in shaping a better world. I regard that as a very interesting project.

Journalist: Prime Minister Hawke, your Government's and Australia's challenge for the 90s?

PM: Challenge for the 90s is continuing what we've been doing and that is to try and make an Australia that is going to be best placed to take advantage of the challenges and opportunities of the twenty first century. We're trying to make an Australia which is (a) a more competitive, efficient economy. That involves changes to education and training, to industrial structures. We're very well placed, geographically and in terms of resources to make an enormous contribution to and benefit from the dynamic growth of the region of which we are part. But also to be an Australia which is sure of itself, an Australia composed of people who respect and love one another, because it is only on the basis of respect and love for one another that we are going to be most efficient and most prosperous. I think we've gone a long way down the path of achieving these goals, so it's not a question, Meredith, of having new visions, setting new goals, those visions and goals have been fixed for me and before I became Prime Minister and throughout the Prime Ministership, what we can say for the 90s now is through the experience of these last six years, we know that those goals are achievable. I think we've learnt better how to work towards them. I would love to see the 90s, this last

decade of this vibrant and dramatic twentieth century conclude with us all knowing that we are better placed to take advantage of the enormous opportunities of being where we are in the world, as part of this region which is growing so fast, which is increasingly respected for our traditions of democracy, of commitment to the rights of individuals and taking our place as a leading member of that region. Those are the sorts of things that we have to do and, as I say, I think we're better placed to do it now than we were six years ago and basically that is because, as Australians, we've learnt to know one another better. We do have greater confidence in one another, we are less of a confrontationalist society than we were at the beginning of the 80s. Those are the things we have to build on in the 90s.

Journalist: Prime Minister, thank you very much.

PM: It's been my pleasure Meredith, thank you very much.

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