



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT NEWS CONFERENCE WITH THE HON MICHAEL FIELD,
MLA, CITY MILL BUILDING, HOBART, 6 MAY 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

PM: I'm very pleased to be over here in Hobart this morning with Michael Field and I want at the outset to pay tribute to the way in a very short time he's established himself as a very dynamic Leader of the Labor Party and from what I'm about to say you'll understand that that's not just a formal acknowledgement of a dynamic new Leader but that there is very strong evidence of that fact. I'm here today to say that I'm very pleased to be able to announce that agreement has been reached between my Federal Labor Government and Michael on behalf of the Tasmanian Labor Party to explore the feasibility of establishing here in Tasmania Australia's first unbleached paper mill after the election of the Labor Government next Saturday. Michael Field came to see me in Canberra last Tuesday night, he brought his idea and explained to me that idea and as a result of those discussions which he initiated, we've agreed that a study will be conducted into the feasibility of what we can call an environmentally friendly mill for Tasmania to produce unbleached paper and paper products. We had already made a decision that we were going to be sending an expert team to Finland and Sweden to investigate the operation of paper mills in those two very important countries. But as a result of Michael Field's intervention and suggestion to me we have agreed to add to the terms of reference of that team of experts so that in addition to what they were going to be doing before they will be investigating the processes for the production of unbleached paper and also the potential for expanded markets for unbleached paper products. Now I want to say that as a result of Michael's discussions with me, we have (a) reached the agreement, (b) added to the terms of reference of that team of experts and (c) indicated that Tasmania's representatives will be involved beyond the return of that team of experts in the evaluation of the missions' technical report and any follow-up work that's involved. And using data gathered by that mission, which as I say has been upgraded in its work as a result of Michael's reference to me, that using that data from that mission a Tasmanian Labor Government after the next election will conduct a major feasibility study into an unbleached paper products plant in Tasmania. That study will cover the potential

(PM cont) Australian and international markets for unbleached paper products and the economic environmental and social implications of an unbleached paper products plant. Let me say that we've agreed that industry will be invited to participate in the State Government's feasibility study. Importantly we've agreed, both of us, on behalf of my Government and the Government that he'll be forming after Saturday that our two Government's would lead the way in using high quality unbleached paper produced by the mill so that there would be quite clearly a substantial market involved in that and we would then do our best to convince Australians to choose unbleached paper products wherever practicable and in that way we'll obviously be creating a market for environmentally clean processes and importantly helping to establish jobs for Tasmanians. Now let me conclude as I began by paying tribute to Michael Field, as I say he's been a Leader for a relatively short time. If Tasmanians wanted any proof at all - and they may have - if they wanted any proof at all of the dynamism, the imagination, the capacity for decisions and a commitment tenaciously to pursue the interests of Tasmanians it's been dramatically provided by this imaginative concept to which we have responded immediately and positively and one can say that here you have the proof positive if you're Tasmanians interested with your future welfare, proof positive of the way in which Labor in this State is able to work positively, constructive and immediately with the Federal Government in a way which stands in stark contrast with the confrontationism which seems to be the characteristic of the present Premier of this State.

FIELD: I welcome the opportunity in my first discussions with the Prime Minister as Leader, to get such a positive result. We're committed in Tasmania to downstreaming our products, particularly wood. At the moment we're exporting some three million tonnes of wood in woodchips to Japan. Obviously that can't go on indefinitely but we want to make sure that we have the cleanest possible process here in Tasmania as soon as we can but we don't want to rush into it so that we adopt development at any price. Now with this latest advancement and the study that's been announced today, we are going to be certain that Tasmania will lead the world with the pulp and paper mill to produce unbleached paper and that to me is a great breakthrough because Tasmania's future is producing environmentally friendly products onto a quality world market and this is symbolic of the direction of a new Labor Government that will be elected next Saturday. That's really all I wish to say in addition to what the Prime Minister has said.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister does this mean that in future you'd be less enthusiastic about approving the construction of bleached kraft pulp mills?

PM: Well let me say this. The mission that we had already approved to go over was to examine those existing type of mills because we want to have a situation where at least we are as well informed as we possibly can be about what are the environmentally most acceptable processes in regard to existing types of kraft works. So it's sensible that we have that information. When Michael came and saw me and said, "now look can't we together look at the concept of the unbleached mill", it made sense to do that and we will be giving priority in our consideration to that proposal. But it remains sensible that we look at the other area as well. But we'll give this a priority, it's new, it's exciting, it offers all the possibilities of environmentally acceptable standards ... jobs and there is evidence around the world now that people are looking in a variety of products for the unbleached product. I mean let me mention this for instance in the area of disposable nappies and tampons. There is a growing concern now that there may be possible dangers in the bleached products and there's a move towards considering the use of unbleached products. Some computer operators also are looking at environmentally friendly paper for computer operations. So it makes a great deal of sense to pick up Michael Field's suggestion and try and get Tasmania in at the forefront of that. We'll still have a look at whether there are ways in which it would be environmentally acceptable processes for the other but it's quite clear that we just were not going to buy the sort of proposals that were put up before.

JOURNALIST: With the marketing could the Federal Government help the unbleached paper ...

PM: Yes I said -

JOURNALIST: inaudible

PM: Well I've said that we've agreed there that as far as our two Governments are concerned that we would use that product -

JOURNALIST: inaudible

PM: I think in our case it's between - and I say this with a pretty wide ... - but I think it's of the order of 10 to 15,000 tonnes as far as the Commonwealth Government is concerned. I don't know what the Tasmanian Government would use but I would think that if the Commonwealth Government gave that sort of lead that it would be, I think, influential in affecting other governments and a lot of users.

JOURNALIST: As a proportion -

PM: And of course could I just add to that that this would not only be in terms of domestic markets, for exports as well and part of the study that I've asked to be done now is to see what the potential in the export area is as well.

JOURNALIST: As a proportion of the paper that the federal bureaucracy generates, how much would that represent?

PM: I'm saying that I'm given to understand that something of the order of 10 to 15,000 tonnes is the paper that's consumed at the Federal Government level.

JOURNALIST: ... the federal paper workers going to be ...

PM: I thought that was the sort of figure of total use of paper. That was the figure that was put before me. But I think obviously in the nature of things this is something that would have to be looked at reasonably quickly. So I don't want to be held with precision on that figure. Those were the figures that were put before me.

JOURNALIST: Is this commitment independent of the Commonwealth's commitment to write clear environmental guidelines for future pulp mills?

PM: What we've said in regard to the drawing up of future environmental guidelines is that I've asked my Ministers to be looking at the question of whether there can be general guidelines acknowledging that by definition certain geographical circumstances by definition would'nt be replicated in another place. So it may be impossible to have absolutely general ... generally applicable guidelines but we are looking at that issue. Let me make it quite clear that where you've got to see the great merit, great virtue of what Michael Field has done is to say, well there is uncertainty in the area of the kraft processes of the bleached product and he wants to add another very substantial bow, a string to Tasmania's bow, and he's done that. Because if in fact we can establish as a result of the expert inquiry that we'll initiate and his Government would then follow up, that there is a substantial market for the unbleached product. We're jumping in in a way which is acceptable for everyone. But it doesn't mean that it doesn't make sense to look at the other area with a view in those areas that we can with existing product to get processes which generally would be acceptable as environmentally acceptable.

PM: Prime Minister would you agree that there isn't a commercial market without public education and promotion?

PM: I think public education and promotion will be part of it but as I said, one of the things we're going to be asking this mission to do is when they are overseas to have a look at what's developing internationally. I mean I'm sure on what I've seen put before me, I've mentioned this move in the area of disposable nappies and tampons, that there seems to be a growing concern there so we would want to look at that and as I said I just briefly looked at any article which indicated that the computer industry was starting to concern itself with developing a campaign for the use of environmentally friendly paper as far as computers are concerned. So it seems to me without pretending to have an expert knowledge at this stage, it does seem to me that there are tendencies developing in the world which to me would imply the existence of a market and when you add to that the preparedness that we'd have governments to use such paper products, I would tend to feel that the market will be there.

JOURNALIST: inaudible

FIELD: The situation is that the world's moving very quickly, particularly Sweden. It's passed legislation concerning ... and omissions and that obviously there's going to be a growing market for unbleached paper and if markets can be shown to be there, producers will produce. So this study in fact is establishing the viability of such a process and if it does there'd be interest in it. There's no doubt about that. What they are concerned about is markets and if markets can be provided then there'll be people who'll be very interested in producing a world first here in Tasmania.

JOURNALIST: And would paper for the Federal and Tasmanian bureaucracies be enough to ... sell it to -

FIELD: No they would have to be exported as well. This is a very large - mills that produced unbleached paper would have to export. But there's a growing export market and demand for it because of the problem with organochlorines around the world in terms of effluent. Some countries have already moved to it - Sweden is the most advanced - and therefore it's moved very quickly in the last 18 months and if markets can be provided then the product will be provided, assuming that it's technically feasible and that's what this study is all about.

PM: Let me just say that there's one thing that's certain about what's happening in the world today. I'd suggest that it is that the world is becoming more environmentally conscious and in those terms I would be confident of the existence into the future of markets adequate to pick up the output, the proposed output of Wesley Vale was of the order of 400,000 tonnes so to go precisely to a question given the answer I did to say 10-15,000 tonnes of Commonwealth Government usage, you can get some idea then that the relationship and the inadequacy of that of itself to provide a market. But given when I say the fact that the world is becoming every day more environmentally conscious. I'd be confident of a future market.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke will your commitment hold for whoever wins government after this election?

PM: Well I think that's hypothetical and I expect Mr Field to form the next Government after next Saturday. But the point is that it's Michael Field, Michael Field alone, whose initiative it was that I've been talking with and it's a contrast between Michael Field and his imagination and the negativism and consultationism which is characterised over the whole period that we've been here, the attitude of the existing Premier. I'm expecting that Michael Field will be the next Premier.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister if Michael Field can't form a majority Government ... form a minority Government?

PM: Well, I'm not here to say what he should do, I'm here to agree with what I understand, I mean if I didn't I'd say I didn't but I do agree with what he said and that is (a) that he expects to have a majority, (b) if he doesn't then there won't be any coalition, no deal, he would form a Government and expect in those circumstances to have support, but that's not a coalition or a deal. But he deserves to be given a mandate by the people of Tasmania to form a Government. He has shown in a very short time that he's got the qualities, the determination and the imagination to look after the interests of the people of Tasmania.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, you expressed a view at the outset of the campaign that you expected a minority Government in Tasmania -

PM: No, no, no I said that that was a possibility. If you look back through my transcript I said I expected Labor to win. I said, as a person who studies politics, that's a possibility that you could have a situation where they didn't have a majority, but in those circumstances I would still hope and expect that he would form a Government.

JOURNALIST: Do you think that independents holding balance of power in a minority Government is bad ... for the Government?

PM: Well, it may be made but it's not as bad as having no Government. If we were talking totally hypothetically to have a situation where neither of the major parties in fact have a majority in their own right, then there's got to be a government and I would have thought that in those circumstances it is Michael Field and the Labor Party who should and would govern because they've got a clear program and one which it seems to me should be the most acceptable to those in the Parliament, but Michael Field is right to say there's no coalition, no deal.

JOURNALIST: One of the reasons Mr Gray gave for calling this election was the poor financial deal he was getting from the Commonwealth. How do you react to that?

PM: Well, I react as I normally do to just about anything that Mr Gray says. The unfortunate thing about Mr Gray is that he has a constitutional capacity to match what comes out of his mouth with what are the facts. Which is a very polite way of saying something else. Now, not too complex I hope. The facts are, and that he's been good enough to acknowledge at the end of Premiers' Conferences, that I and the Commonwealth Government have declined to impose upon Tasmania that aggregate outcome which the proposed relativity that is suggested by independent authorities would impact upon Tasmania. I have on each occasion been prepared to go beyond that, to do more, because I recognise the peculiar circumstances of Tasmania. Now I don't have to rely on simply being here in an election campaign and naturally saying something by way of rhetoric that would be helpful. The facts are quite clear and again there is public indications by my conservative opponents of the fact that Hawke's stuck rigorously to the commitment he made from 1983 onwards. From the time of the Franklin Dam I've more than kept the promise I made then and I have, for instance, on the question of the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation subsidy, I've been subject to very considerable pressures from the bureaucracy and from economic rationalists within the Government to say the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation subsidy should go. Now, it's because I have a commitment to Tasmania and because it's the Labor Party in Tasmania that has really kept a constructive pressure on us on these issues, which kept it there. And if you look at what we put into Launceston for the training of Air Traffic Officers, again there the bureaucracy was saying to me and some of the economic rationalists were saying, shouldn't come to Tasmania, that it made more rational, national economic sense to put it on the mainland. Now I took the view that Tasmania does need particular consideration. In my thinking about it I've always been pressed on that point by the Labor Party, the Labor leadership here in Tasmania. So Mr Gray hasn't got it right and on his own facts hasn't got it right. He knows and has been prepared to say so privately that we have taken into account the special circumstances of Tasmania. But I must say that in coming ultimately to the conclusions in the whole range of areas that I've made in regard to Tasmania and making decisions which are particularly helpful to Tasmania, that in getting to that position I've been most helped and consistently most helped by the constructive pressure that's been put upon me by the Labor Party from Tasmania.

JOURNALIST: Have Tasmanians suffered though as a result of this poisonous nature of the relationship between you and Mr Gray?

PM: Well, when you have a situation that emerged that because I couldn't have a one-on-one conversation with Mr Gray, you'd have a one-on-one conversation he'd go out and misrepresent what was said, and I've never been able therefore, never been prepared to have discussions other than with other people present, and that's the only Premier, the only State Premier with whom that's happened. I mean, take the departed but not so much lamented Joe Bjelke-Petersen, I've had my rough times with him in private conversations, but Petersen never went out of a private conversation and misrepresented what happened.

JOURNALIST: But as a result of this has Tasmania suffered -

PM: Well, I must say that obviously if you've got a situation where you can't have that direct basis of consultation then it must, the interests of Tasmanians must suffer because they've got to ask themselves why is it that only their Premier is at that situation with the Prime Minister. Now, fortunately for Tasmanians, in the end they haven't suffered but not because of that, but because the incompetence and incapacity to conduct relations between us that has characterised this period, has been more than compensated by the readiness of the Parliamentary Labor Party here to fill that gap and now you've got the classic example of Michael Field who's come in and instead of having stand-offs that have existed before, he's come in and said here's a positive proposal and we've responded to it.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, how effective do you think a Premier could be to represent us today if we have a hung Parliament on May 13 and as a result what would that be on the Premier's Conference?

PM: Oh well, when Michael Field is there, as I believe he will be, I think he'll be an effective representative. I mean I can't be dogmatic about outcomes but it's my belief that Michael Field will be there, he certainly deserves to be.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, a business group has begun a campaign in Tasmania against the independents on the basis that they would bring unstable government. Knowing Bob Brown and perhaps Christine Milne as you do, I wonder whether you might give an assessment of what you think of them as performers in that role in supporting a minority government perhaps?

PM: Well ... to say I don't know Christine Milne, I may have met her sometime in the past - I don't want to be rude to her, I'm not aware of having met her, perhaps I have - but I certainly haven't met her recently, so I can't make any comment on the basis of knowledge about her. I've had dealings with Bob Brown, he's a forceful advocat of his particular views. I have to say, and I mean I'm not disclosing any State secrets, I don't think Bob Brown would mind me saying so, that I've had reason to think in some of my dealings with him that in the pursuit of the things and issues which he deeply believes in, and I respect him for his beliefs, I'm not questioning that, I think at times that he hasn't had a full perspective of economic considerations. I mean the great issue facing not merely Tasmania and Australia, but the world, is of getting a proper balance between development and discharging the undoubted obligation that we have to future generations to protect the environment and our heritage. Now, my observation about Bob Brown would be that in his single minded commitment to matters environmental I don't think he has at all times got the degree of reasonable balance that I think is needed. But I'm not saying that to try and knock the man, its an honest observation and when he's been dealing with me he's put his point of view directly and you're never in any doubt of what his position is. I would question at times the appropriateness of the balance. But in the end, in the end, the issue is this. There are only two groups in this election that can form a Government and that is the bloke that's been there and produced a situation where you've got the worst economic performance in Tasmania of any State in Australia, a failed economic manager, and one who has failed, general speaking in terms of his capacity to conduct rational relations with the Federal Government, an issue which is of central importance to the welfare of the people of Tasmania. So that's on the one hand, you've got that, and on the other you've got a fresh new dynamic young leader of the Labor Party whose leading a Party which has got policies which are relevant and a capacity for co-operation and consultation with the Federal Government which is unmatched. In end, that's the issue.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, with due respect to Mr Field's initiative, isn't it true that we wouldn't be at this point without that public opinion campaign fuelled by Dr Brown and Ms Milne? We wouldn't be at the point of talking about unbleached paper and unbleached pulp mills?

PM: Well Michael, no doubt will have something to say about that but let me say no I don't accept that Ms Milne and Dr Brown have any monopoly of concern about the environment at all. I mean, just lets look at the record, the Australian record. OK as far as this Government was concerned it started with the Franklin and I pay clear and unqualified tribute to Bob Brown and others down here who were involved in that, and its no secret that the Labor Party had its divisions and problems about that, that's a fact of history, Brown is entitled to a significant credit for what developed there, no question. But I've been in Government, I've been Prime Minister of this country now for more than 6 years and I personally have a deep commitment to the environment, no one questions that. I have Ministers, successive Ministers who've had that environment, I have in Senator Richardson a man who doesn't look to anyone, whether its Brown or anyone else as a guru, he has his own instinctive commitment to and passion for matters environmental and you look at the record, everything that was done, we are not a Government or a Party which needs inspiration or direction or motivation from anyone else. I pay tribute to all those have their deep commitment -

JOURNALIST: I was referring on a State level.

PM: Yes, but on a State level, I can say before Michael goes to it, let me make this point. When I was down here earlier and the issue of Wesley Vale was on I didn't for instance see Mr Brown or Ms Milne, but I had a whole lot of other people, a range of people including for instance people from the Farmers Federation, a whole lot of community organisations and Labor Party people, who were pressing this issue to me. I didn't have any personal representation from either of the people you're talking about.

FIELD: Right, the Labor Party here has had divisions in the past on the environment, but it was the Labor Party that split because it wanted to save the Franklin Dam and gave the opportunity of those groups to create a political climate where in the end a Labor Federal Government saved the Franklin, when a Gray Government here was hell bent right from the start of damming the Franklin. If you take the Wesley Vale matter, we had a straightforward policy right from beginning to end and that was support subject to proper environmental control and we opposed the revised guidelines because they didn't give that control. Now, it was the Federal Government again that on advice to it could not approve, given their reservations, about the fiasco that was created here in Tasmania by the Gray Government. Now, to explain causality in terms of a pressure group outside the Government and give them all credit is a simplification of history in my judgement because the facts speak a far more complex story. Suffice to say that given our position now,

(FIELD cont) this initiative will make sure that developments in Tasmania will be clean and environmentally safe and that's the assurance that this agreement gives to Tasmanians and Tasmanians can be assured that, with cooperation with the Federal Government, that it will be there for a long time. We can get far better outcomes with far less division than has been a feature of Tasmanian politics for the last ten years and I think that's the message that people need to get from today's conference.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, it's early today yet but would you like to waive Ian McPhee goodbye?

PM: I wouldn't like to waive him goodbye but, and I don't know whether I could get through the crowd of the reactionary new right troglodytes in Victoria who are intent not on waiving him goodbye, which is a reasonably felicitous way of saying farewell to someone, but kicking him substantially in the backside. Now they are so many and numerous clamouring to do that that I don't know that I could be seen. But as I say, I leave the internal affairs of the Liberal Party to the Liberal Party. Each passing day they demonstrate their incapacity and unfitness for office.

ends