



PRIME MINISTER

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JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what does the Tasmanian result mean for your policies in terms of the environment?

PM: Well it means that clearly the judgement has been made that as far as the two major parties are concerned the Labor Party has the best policy on the environment. You see we held our vote. The great swing to the Independents in Tasmania has come from the Liberals. This is not surprising because their record on the environment is disastrous. They have just talked states' rights, states' rights and let any development go ahead whereas we have an unsurpassed record on the environment. So that's the clear message down there.

JOURNALIST: Does it mean to some extent the next election will be won and lost on that kind of vote?

PM: No the Australian electorate is not a single issue electorate. It is quite clear however that in the way the political scene is developing in Australia, Independents are being listened to somewhat more than they were before. No-one can dispute that and thankfully it is the case, and I say thankfully from my point of view, that environmental issues are becoming more significant in the minds of the electorate. I say thankfully because it is important that the sorts of things that we've been talking about should be becoming more widely accepted. The questions not only of specific geographical environmental issues like the pulp mill for instance in which we acted so decisively but increasingly importantly the global issues of the Greenhouse Effect and the depletion of the ozone layer are issues for which we have a great responsibility and in which we've already begun to act very decisively and in which we'll be doing more.

JOURNALIST: Are people getting disillusioned with the major parties though?

PM: I suppose there's some element, not so much of disillusionment but that they are thinking in some respects more about particular issues and where people stand up and say this is an issue which we regard as important they are able to attract some votes. But I'm not worried about this because it is my Party which on these major issues has taken the lead. If you look at this Government since 1983

PM (cont): starting with the saving of the Franklin Dam, it's only the major parties that can make the decisions which affect the environment and if you look at us from the Franklin Dam onwards, Kakadu, Barrier Reef, the rainforest in Daintree, the rainforest in Tasmania - the protection of the forest there, on all these issues of the environment it is the Hawke Labor Government which has acted and acted more decisively than any other government in the history of this country.

JOURNALIST: You're very relaxed about the result then, it doesn't really provide any particular concern for you?

PM: Any politician who is ever relaxed in any political situation is silly. You should never be relaxed. I think the hallmark of this Government is that we have to a very large extent set the agenda. I repeat, the 1983 election to some considerable extent was fought on the issue of saving the Franklin. Now who was it that said we'll save it? It was me, my Party and then my Government which did it. On every important issue we have been there. I acknowledge without reservation the significance of the people like Bob Brown and so on who have had this single issue as their overriding concern but the important thing is that action, action to do things which are important in the environment is only possible by a government formed by the major party. And overwhelmingly it has been my Labor Government which has set the pace in that respect.

JOURNALIST: Is a Labor/Independent Government viable and should Gray concede to make way for that sort of government?

PM: I'm not telling Mr Gray, and more particularly I'm not purporting to tell the Governor of Tasmania how they should act there, that's a matter for them. Because the most interesting thing on the political agenda which has emerged today is in a sense not so much Tasmania but we now have the clear position where the federal president of the Liberal Party is setting the agenda for the new parliamentary leader, Mr Peacock. He's put the consumption tax right back on the table but in a quite deceptive way. He's saying well we wouldn't do it in our first term because that might be a bit electorally lead in the saddlebag. But he's saying that's what our agenda is. Now to have the consumption tax put back on the agenda is interesting, interesting in two ways. One that it means that the powers behind the throne, and of course Mr Elliott is that, without Mr Elliott Mr Peacock wouldn't be the leader of the Liberal Party now. But he's making it quite clear from day one virtually that he's going to set the agenda. Now, it would be a disastrous agenda, it would mean a massive increase in the consumer price index at a time now when we're starting to get

PM (cont): inflation under control. It would impose a very very significant burden on ordinary working people and pensioners, those on benefits, because when we were talking about it before it was in a circumstance where we were able to work out a total compensation arrangement for workers and pensioner beneficiaries.

JOURNALIST: So Prime Minister, you're ruling out the possibility of a consumption tax ... for the foreseeable future?

PM: I am ruling out a consumption tax. The clear political agenda, the clear political division has been settled by Mr Elliott, the man who enabled Mr Peacock to become leader of the Liberal Party has said now right at the beginning of it, 'Mr Peacock, you got there because I let you get there, and I'm telling you now that the consumption tax is on the agenda, but I'll be a little bit deceptive about it Mr Peacock, I'll allow you the chance of deceiving the electorate. We won't put in the first term but I'm telling you Andrew I, Mr Elliott, who let you get there, I'm telling you it's squarely on the agenda'. I'm happy about that because as far as the Hawke Labor Government is concerned a consumption tax is not on the agenda and will not be on the agenda.

JOURNALIST: Are you pleased with Labor's performance in the Merthyr by-election?

PM: A very interesting outcome there. The conservative parties have had a massive loss in their combined vote from about ... while we have had an increase in our vote, a very significant increase in our vote. It means, as I've said for some time now the end of the Ahern National Party government and it indicates a very good chance I think in a general election in the state up there of Wayne Goss forming a Goss Labor Government.

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