



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT NEWS CONFERENCE WITH THE HON BOB BROWN, MINISTER FOR LAND TRANSPORT AND SHIPPING SUPPORT, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, 5 DECEMBER 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

PM: Australia is faced with terrible carnage on its roads. The figures are quite dramatic when you understand that someone dies every three hours, someone is seriously injured every nineteen minutes and someone suffers minor injuries every six minutes. Road accidents are the major cause of death in people up to middle age and they account for 75% of the deaths of young men. We have got to come to an understanding that the present situation is simply not good enough. In that context the Government has considered a proposal that has come from Bob Brown, the relevant Minister, which has been under consideration for some period of time. We have been given to understand that there are two things that need to be done. Firstly, you have the situation where a number of black spots, if I can put it that way, that's the jargon, have been identified by local authorities around Australia which points at which fatal and serious accidents occur with more regularity than elsewhere. It's suggested that a figures of some \$150M over a period of three years could eliminate those black spots and the Government has decided on a program of \$110M from Commonwealth sources which would be \$50M in the first year, 1991, \$35M in the second year and \$25M in the third year. These areas of responsibility are fundamentally of course, with the States. But we are prepared in this one-off three year program to substantially meet the cost that's involved in fixing these black spots. And we would expect that in those second two years we will put in \$35 and \$25M if the States would be prepared to pick up that balance. We will be putting that money in for that period of three years as an absolute commitment. But as I say, we would hope and expect that the States, in respect to those second two years, would pick up their share of that responsibility. The money that is to be made available will be conditional upon the States being prepared themselves to implement a set of what would then become national uniform measures. To do this on a co-ordinated basis, that would be to have national .05 alcohol limit levels, a national licensing of heavy truck and bus drivers, national uniform speed limits, speed limiters for heavy vehicles, adoption of zero alcohol limits for young drivers, to increase enforcement to ensure that there is a one in four testing of drivers for

random breath testing for alcohol, to implement a graduated licensing system for young drivers, to introduce compulsory bicycle helmet wearing, to introduce daylight running lights for motorcyclists and to increase enforcement of seat belt and child restraint wearing. Each one of those points have been identified by the relevant authorities as issues which, if implemented, will have a significant effect of the reduction of road fatalities and road trauma resulting from road accidents and the provision of the Commonwealth money to States will be conditional upon them agreeing to take the relevant action to meet those requirements.

Additionally, we will be making a sum of some \$10M available to support extra research into vehicle design and other strategic issues and public education programs aimed at changing public attitudes and behaviour on the roads which is relevant to the level of road accidents. As I say, as a nation we have to face up to the appalling cost to this nation which flows from the level of carnage, fatalities and accidents on the roads. The Office of Road Safety estimates that road accidents cost some \$6B a year, of which the health system bears about \$3.5B. Some 30,000 Australians are admitted to hospital each year as a result of road trauma. So given the magnitude of this issue, not merely the tragedy of deaths but the tragedy associated with massive trauma, for instance the estimate is that for every paraplegic it emerges from these accidents a cost through life of that on average is about \$1M. So this is an issue of enormous importance and as a Commonwealth Government we are determined to make a contribution and a significant contribution on both fronts. That is significant financial assistance to fixing black spots which are the points of serious regular accidents and through the provision of this money, to get the cooperation of the States to address these other issues which are recognised as being important in reducing the too high road toll and road trauma results in this country. Bob, do you want to add anything?

BROWN: I just want to emphasise Prime Minister, that while the Commonwealth Government quite clearly has committed itself to a continuing program of road construction, there are still very many centres around Australia which the Prime Minister has identified as black spots, where crashes are occurring daily and where people are being seriously injured and where people are dying. What we've done is to decide on this occasion that we will now supplement the \$1.3B that we'll put into road construction this year with these additional funds so that together with State authorities and local authorities we'll identify where those black spots are and we'll lift them out of the system. We estimate that as a result of this program we'll be able to identify about a thousand of them around Australia where crashes and deaths have been occurring too greater frequency. There is a heightened level of community concern, as there should be, about the trauma on the roads. There

have been some dramatic improvements but they're not good enough. And I applaud the decision that the Prime Minister has encouraged from the Government to ensure that these funds would be provided and that we would recognise the very serious deficiencies that exist on many of our local roads, many of our State roads. We will assist State authorities and local authorities as well to overcome those problems, to correct the black spots, to stop the crashes and save lives.

JOURNALIST: ... second and third year. Are you saying that you want the States to make up to \$50M for each of those years ...

PM: ... we believe that Michelle, that as this area is an area of State responsibility we can't - nor would the States legitimately expect that we would pick up the responsibility for this black spots area. It has been identified as about \$150M. That would be estimated at about \$50M over three years. We will put the whole of the \$50M in the first year. But in terms of the States moving to pick up what would be their total responsibility after three years, that they would pick up you know, \$15M in the second year and \$25M in the third.

JOURNALIST: inaudible

PM: Our money will be put in.

JOURNALIST: inaudible

BROWN: That will relate to probationary drivers. One of the problems at the present time I think people should generally understand is that those young drivers between 17 and 25, they make up about 15% of the population but they account for 35% of the deaths. And of those 35% of the total deaths, 80% of them are young men. So what we're concerned - and of course alcohol and that age group, for all age groups through the motoring population, alcohol is a very important element in it. Those who are on probation, those who have picked up their permit and are still in that period of time when they're required to be driving accompanied by an experienced driver, generally that will be a period of about two years. The limit on the blood alcohol content will be zero.

JOURNALIST: What national speed limits are you seeking?

BROWN: Well at the present time we've got some of the States which have applied the 100km an hour limit and others 110. As the Prime Minister has indicated, I will this week be in touch with the State Ministers to indicate when that meeting will be held before Christmas. And that's one of the issues that we will need to resolve. It is possible -

JOURNALIST: Do you have any preferences?

BROWN: My preference is for one which exists in NSW, but I understand the concern on the part of many of those State Transport Ministers that it be lower. In fact, in Victoria they've just reduced it and the reason for that is quite apparent. There is concern about the impact of speed but most of those crashes which are caused by speed are not those which are caused as a result of vehicles remaining within the legal speed limit. Those which are caused as a result of speed are when the vehicles become airborne over metres and wrap themselves around trees and telegraph poles and till those people are inside, and they're not travelling at 110 kms an hour, many of them travelling at 140, 150 160kms an hour. That's where we need much more effective, of course, traffic enforcement as well. But that will be resolved by the State Transport Ministers. I've got no doubt that they're going to welcome this list of elements of that total package that we're presenting to them because not only have they very often been pursuing these objectives themselves, but they know that the community quite correctly has become intolerant to the point where the community will demand that those elements be adopted and the State Ministers will respond. I'm sure they will respond admirably. In fact they could well be looking forward when opportunity of this kind to precipitate the adoption of a package which is the most comprehensive package of the most important elements of those factors on the roads that are contributing to the road trauma. And with the cooperation of all of those State Transport Ministers and the two Territorial Ministers, this is going to represent a very substantial advance.

JOURNALIST: Do all States have to agree before the Federal Government will hand over the money or is it just on an individual basis?

BROWN: No, each State will need itself to agree with that package prior to any of this money being allocated to their State. Now I don't think that that - while that's been made a condition and a requirement - I don't believe that it would have been necessary because I believe that the State transport ministers right across Australia are themselves, individually, and as representatives of their government, they are sufficiently responsive to the need for these things to be introduced right across Australia, that they would have welcomed it anyway. Here's the opportunity now for us to precipitate it, to get uniform agreement to get things put into place and I've got no doubt that there will be absolute cooperation.

JOURNALIST:clarify, if any States disagree, will you still proceed with the money to the other States?

BROWN: Not to the other States, yes, but not to that State which, I don't - there won't be, there won't be any State which doesn't agree.

PM: OK, are we, have we got any further questions?

JOURNALIST: As in NSW you're on P-plates for the first year of your licence, that's what you are talking about is it?

BROWN: That will be the probationary period, but as a result of when we get, we will get the transport ministers together and in the process of identifying and clarifying some of those discrepancies, often very marginal discrepancies that exist between the States, we will be seeking to ensure uniformity. I think everyone understands that with six States and two Territories and one Commonwealth Government, that's often very difficult. But they do respond and they're responding admirably and better and better all the time as they will with that program and that package.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

BROWN: Beg your pardon?

JOURNALIST: That probation period may be extended?

BROWN: Depending - well if they choose to extend it, if they choose to extend it it could well be extended.

JOURNALIST: black spots, I mean there are pieces of rural roads that are infrequently used that are quite dangerous as a proportion of accidents can be to the usage?

BROWN: We would expect the particular spots themselves to be identified first of all by local authorities and then secondly by the State transport authorities and most likely from their regional office. They will then be submitted through, they'll come through to an assessment panel which will consist with appropriate representation from the three levels of government. We will be expecting, in the first place, that the benefit cost ratio in terms of the return for the money that's, that that the elimination of that black spot would cost, the ratio would be at least two to one so there's a positive economic benefit in it, but it would also of course be dependent on the number of crashes and fatalities and injuries that have been associated with that spot. To some extent, of course, that will be a subjective judgement, but the subjective judgement will be on the part of a group of people that will be representative of three levels of government, not just ourselves, but the others as well.

JOURNALIST: One area of a lack of uniformity that you haven't addressed is the age at which people may in fact drive. Does that indicate that there's little evidence to show

BROWN: No, in fact the evidence, of course, indicates that the more chronological maturity on the part of the person, the more likely it is that they will act responsibly when they're in charge of a vehicle and that many of these questions of detail concerning uniformity, of course, have been addressed and have been pursued through ATAC, the combined transport ministers conference, and they're the people that I'll be bringing together before Christmas and the March ATAC meeting that was intended for next year will also be brought forward into the early part of next year because we want to make sure that we're addressing each of these problems adequately.

JOURNALIST: That issue is not the condition of this particular package?

PM: No it's not, no it's not.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Yes, you see at the present where this relates not only to motor cars and trucks, the heavy articulated trucks back to the fixed structure trucks, but also to motor cycles. I think people generally understand now that, for example, a relatively young man can go out in a relatively small truck and pick up a 5A licence and tomorrow he can be out on the road with some of those very large articulated trucks without either the experience or the age or the level of responsibility which are necessary for him adequately to control that vehicle. Now the same sort of thing applies with motor cars as well and it's been suggested, and we will work out the details together with the State transport ministers, many of these now have been pursued. Questions of the appropriate age at which the permit should be available, the question of the age at which the licence should be available and, in order to ensure that there is a growing capacity on the part of the individual rider or driver to adequately control the vehicle which they're riding or driving, there will be then graduation built into it. The best example, of course, that can and will relate to motor cycles and motor, family type motor cars as well, but the best example relates to trucks, so that depending upon the age, the qualifications, the experience, the level of responsibility, so the individuals drivers' right to handle increasingly large, more difficult to control vehicles will be graduated through the licence system.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

BROWN: The reason is that when you have 160 kms an hour on a road which is able or capable of taking that speed, that you have all of the traffic moving together. What you say is perfectly correct, they do have a very good accident record until one crash occurs. And when they're travelling at that speed, then of course they all pile up behind. So it does have its pluses, it also has its minuses and the State transport ministers in Australia, as was indicated with one of the earlier questions have decided that the appropriate maximum speeds in Australia should be 100 or 110. Now that's not a great, that's not a big margin, it would, of course, be better if we could get some consistent coordinated approach right across Australia.

JOURNALIST: that the road system is taking too much freight

BROWN: On the eastern seaboard road transport takes about one third of the freight. On the east-west freight routes across Australia rail transport takes about two thirds. The question of the adequate balance between that of course I suppose again is a matter of some subjective judgement. But I think we would all understand that road transport is better suited to some forms of freight movement, more diverse door-to-door type movement. The rail transport is better suited to the long distance bulkier heavy freight. What we want to do and what we're attempting to do of course is to ensure that both of those modes of transport are able to compete with one another to the most appropriate type of freight that they should be carrying and in the process of doing that of course building up what we hope is a pretty comprehensive type of approach to the whole question of developing a total land transport system and network.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke -

PM: Is this off this issue now?

JOURNALIST: ...

PM: Ok, if we can just have a few questions off this issue and then I've got a Cabinet meeting to go to.

JOURNALIST: It's related to this issue. Dr Blewett said today that the cost to Australia of tobacco related disease ... \$2.5 billion and Mr Brown has said road accidents ... \$6 billion ... health ... \$3.5. ... any thought to limiting either alcohol advertisements or some form ...

PM: Well the question of limits on advertising has only to this point arisen in regard to cigarette advertising and not to alcohol. And on the question of the advertising in regard to speed and so on, one of the decisions we've taken today is for a \$10 million fund provision by the Commonwealth for education in regards to

road safety. That goes with a question of attitudes and behaviour on the roads and I would imagine that that element that you've referred to would be part of that education program.

JOURNALIST: Have you received any new ideas in the Cabinet meeting today ... for future policy ideas?

PM: I want to get to that meeting. That hasn't started yet. That's why this is going to be a rather shorter press conference than usual. You'll have the opportunity of talking to me on Thursday. But I don't mind two or three questions now but I want to get back to that important meeting.

JOURNALIST: ... on alcohol advertising Mr Hawke. Do you see any merit at all in ...

PM: If someone wants to put that up it's something I guess you'd look at -

JOURNALIST: Hasn't Gerry Hand put that up?

PM: I've seen Gerry talking about it. He hasn't proposed the Bill.

JOURNALIST: Wasn't that one of the formal recommendations of the National Crime Authority ...?

PM: I don't recall on that point. I mean I have - all I'm indicating is if there is some proposal in that area - to us there hasn't been at this stage - we will look at it.

JOURNALIST: What's your own view?

PM: I haven't developed a view. I happily supported the decision of the Cabinet today. I was happy enough to do that as an occasional cigar smoker I might say. As a non-consumer of alcohol I guess I would have an even more open mind on that issue.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: I did indeed.

JOURNALIST: Do you think alcohol is a major problem?

PM: Of course it's a major problem in society. You'd have to be a monumental dumbwit to argue that proposition.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: I've answered that. I mean if someone wants to put up a proposition about advertising in regards to alcohol I'd be quite happy for it to be on the table.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, would you like to comment on the Labor Council leaked ... Do you support the call for ...

PM: Let me first of all say it is not a Labor Council document. It was some draft proposition by a couple of junior people in the NSW Labor Council. I simply made the point the other day which I repeat now that if you want to look at the position of the NSW Labor Council then logic demands that you see what the position of the Labor Council in NSW is. And the position of the NSW Labor Council was evidenced in their participation in the ACTU Executive meeting last week. So don't let's have any propositions that this is a NSW Labor Council position. It is not. ... draft document prepared by a couple of people who in my judgement don't know what they're talking about. Now on the question of -

JOURNALIST: Do you know who they are?

PM: I've read their names. Whether I've met - I don't know whether I've ever met them. They certainly don't stick in my mind if I have. I see there's been some suggestion or query as to whether I contacted Mr Easson. I didn't contact Mr Easson. He rang me I might say yesterday morning. I think really that the continued employment of these people is a matter for the Labor Council. I must say that if they really believe these things that they put, the Labor Council doesn't really ... in their appropriate area of employment. That's a matter for the Labor Council, not for me. I'm not going to tell them what to do.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: No. Didn't you just hear what I said. I said it's a matter for the Labor Council Milton. I am just saying that obviously people have rights to opinions. I'm simply saying that if they believe the things they've written I don't think that the Labor Council, which has an entirely different position, totally different position, a contradictory position... It hardly seems to me that that's a congenial place for them from their own point of view. But I'm not getting ... But that's a matter for the Labor Council. I'm totally comfortable with the position of the NSW Labor Council and of the ACTU. I mean it's like, I mean I guess I could find somewhere if I suggested that someone might do some searching I could find a document written by - it's even more likely in the next few weeks I suggest that I could find some documents being written by some people within the Liberal Party and the National Party in Queensland, because there's a lot of disaffection there. But because there might be a document floating around written by some particular junior officer of the National Party or the Liberal Party, I don't think that that would necessarily reflect the position of the branch as such or of the Parties nationally.

JOURNALIST: The ACT Government situation ... I was wondering whether you would support moves for a new election ... at all possible ...?

PM: It's a matter to which I have given zilch consideration.

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