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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, HOTEL ROSSI, VANUATU
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E & OE - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Can you tell us about your meeting with Mr Namilau this morning?

PM: I can tell you something about it. Obviously there were some parts of our conversation which ... confidential between us. But I covered a range of matters with him as he did with me. We talked about issues that are peculiarly within the province of Papua New Guinea. We talked about some bilateral matters and we talked about some regional matters. As far as the New Guinea area was concerned, Papua New Guinea, obviously Bougainville took up a fair amount of our time. I clearly can't go to all the details of that. He was kind enough to give me the most up-to-date information about the talks on the New Zealand naval ships. May I take this opportunity in front of this media gathering to pay again, as I have before, my tribute to the Government of New Zealand for providing this facility. I obviously can't go to what he told me in detail about that, but what is clear to me is that the Government of Papua New Guinea is committed to trying to make these talks work. But it's going to take two to tango. There's got to be an equal commitment on the part of the representatives from Bougainville. As I understand it the representatives from Bougainville put fairly specific positions to the representatives of the Government of Papua New Guinea yesterday. They will be responded to by the Government of Papua New Guinea today. I hope that there may be some possibility of the talks continuing to a successful conclusion but on the basis of what I know so far it's a very difficult situation there in those talks. But I can't go any further than that. On other matters, I discussed with the Prime Minister, the decisions that have been recently made by the international community to provide additional financial facilities and economic assistance to the Government and indicated that we had been pleased to be able to be identified with that. The Prime Minister expressed confidence that they would be able to overcome their economic difficulties at the same time acknowledging that this was not an easy road in front of them and there had to be an appropriate exercise of restraint within Papua New Guinea if they were going to meet that objective. We

discussed my visit to Papua New Guinea which will take place at the beginning of September which I'm looking forward to. And I'm going to have the opportunity of getting out of Port Moresby and having a visit around the country with the Prime Minister. I'm looking forward to that very much. He also asked me to talk with him about the situation in New Caledonia and I was able to share specific thoughts with him about that, as with the question of Johnston Atoll. So without being exhaustive, that's the range of the matters that was dealt with.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, was there also some discussion of specific help Australia might give in rehabilitating Bougainville once some sort of consensus is reached?

PM: No, we didn't go to that because the Prime Minister knows that we have a very real interest in trying to see that matter resolved. He knows that if they are able to reach a peaceful resolution of this matter that we will stand ready within the general framework of our assistance to Papua New Guinea to be of assistance there. But the real immediate issue is getting a resolution and that's not easy.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, do you now expect the meeting you hope to have with Ratu Mara tomorrow to go ahead or has Australia's description of the new Fiji constitution as being 'seriously flawed' led to the possibility of Fiji cancelling these talks?

PM: Well I don't know at this stage. All I've had reported to me is some suggestion that the Prime Minister may not wish to have those talks. That has not been conveyed to me. I haven't yet had the opportunity of speaking to him. I was going to try and take an opportunity at the morning tea break but others were speaking with the Prime Minister and it wasn't, I didn't have a courteous opportunity to speak with him. I want to do that if I can today. So I really haven't got any more comment to make on it at this point. I've heard these alleged reports that they don't want to meet. I don't know that that is the position. I probably will know before the end of the day and perhaps when we talk again subsequently we can therefore talk about it on a more informed basis.

JOURNALIST: To what extent is Australia and New Zealand ... upon Fiji ... become a little isolated ... rest of Melanesia and Polynesia?

PM: Well I don't really know what the relative positions are between Australia and New Zealand and Polynesian countries or the Melanesian countries. Because as you'll appreciate, firstly, Fiji is not on the Forum agenda. And to this point it certainly didn't arise at the Retreat nor has it been raised with me by any of the Forum countries. So to the extent there was any discussion about this, if there is it will be between the

Fijian Prime Minister and myself. But, as I say in a previous answer to the question, I'm not really in the position to be definitive about that at this stage.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, on the Johnston Atoll issue, there's been a lot of argy bargy I guess you'd call it from various groups, Greenpeace etc. What chances do you think Australia and New Zealand have of persuading some of the Pacific Island Countries that it is environmentally safe?

PM: Let me make this point first. I haven't come here with a brief that dogmatically I am going to tell the Forum countries what the right position is. We thought we had the responsibility, given the fact that we have available to us a range of scientific capacities which by definition aren't available to our friends in the Forum, that we should have this issue examined by these authorities. Now I want to make it clear that no brief, no Government brief was given to those authorities to which we remitted this question. In other words, we didn't say look, our position as a Government is that we are in favour of this, give us a report which justifies that position. These authorities, the CSIRO, and the Materials Research Laboratory - DASET - looked at this without such riding instruction. Therefore my position is one based on my assessment of what I know to be objective assessments that have been made by those authorities. I repeat, and it's very important - I know the Australian journalists will understand that, the way we operate in Australia - but it's very important for everyone else to understand that that was a position and is a position. Now I have regarded my responsibility in coming therefore to this Forum to share with my Forum colleagues that information. Without going to the detail of that information, it is information and an assessment which leads me to the conclusion that taking all factors into account it is appropriate that the limited proposals in regard to the Johnston Atoll should proceed. And when I say limited proposals let's be quite clear what those limits are. That is that the facilities there should be used in regard to, firstly, the material which is currently on Johnston Atoll. Secondly, from the Federal Republic of Germany. And third any other material that may still be in the Pacific. And that it is appropriate that those materials should be disposed of there under the process which is involved. Now I know that there are those who have a different view. That's life. It'll be a question of me putting the material and Mr Palmer putting his view. I would hope that our colleagues can be persuaded on the basis of this material. I finally make the point that as far as Australia is concerned, we come to this in a rather special situation because I think it can be said that - and I think it is recognised internationally - that no country probably has done more in the area of trying to have established an international convention against chemical weapons than has Australia. Now we've done that in a number of ways.

In the continuing work of the Committee of Disarmament in Geneva. Secondly with our regional initiative. Thirdly, very importantly, with the international conference that was held in Canberra at the end of last year, the first of its kind, which brought governments and the chemical industry together. So you can see the basis on which I say Australia is uniquely involved in this area. Because we have pushed so hard to get its international convention the question of the safe destruction of chemical weapons is for Australia an issue of singular importance. All our involvement and experience in this area means, I think you can understand, that we are not going to bring to this issue some cavalier treatment. The issue is far too fundamental and of continuing importance to Australia to do that.

JOURNALIST: Part of the nervousness though concentrates on whether or not the US will stick to that promise of not sending their large cache of weapons to Johnston Atoll once the process is finished. How confident are you that that's going to be the case?

PM: I'm very confident it will stand. Let me take this opportunity of being quite dogmatic on this point. We will be saying to our United States friends that the position that we're adopting on this matter, and particularly our espousal of this position within the Forum, is based upon that proposition that that commitment will be adhered to. And indeed we have confidence that it will be. We have no reason to doubt it because there is the intention to go ahead with the construction of eight sites in the United States, on mainland United States. We believe that the United States would adhere to that position. We will certainly expect them to.

JOURNALIST: If you're confident about the report, why not make it public?

PM: Well it may be that that will be done. But I'm certainly going to make the substance of the reports available to my friends here in the Forum. We're not just going to put them in our pocket.

JOURNALIST: Why not make them generally public?

PM: Well, I suppose it's a matter of courtesy really. If we've got on the agenda with our friends here this item, I mean it might be the courteous thing to do - and I'm always courteous - that they will be made available to our friends here. The question then of their publication is a matter we'll look at. I mean speaking for myself, I don't see any problem about that. But I'll want to discuss it with some of my colleagues. But I see nothing to be afraid of in releasing them.

JOURNALIST: Are the reports compiled from only US data or has Australian data been collected as well?

PM: Obviously the US data was very important. But let me make this point, unless there is any doubt about it anywhere, that there is a proven competence amongst the Australian Government's advisers in these areas. In particular I've referred to the Materials Research Laboratory. Let me say that that Materials Research Laboratory is a designated facility by the United Nations for the analysis and examination of alleged chemical weapons use. That is the status of that body. The head of the Laboratory's Protective Chemistry Division, Dr Peter Dunn, has actually carried out investigations of chemical weapons use including the question of the disposal of chemical weapons on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. So you can see that people that have been involved in these analyses and are making these recommendations are people with a competence recognised at the highest international level. Let me say that as well as using the material supplied by the United States, they also considered material that was supplied by Greenpeace and by other independent agencies. Also it wasn't just a question of looking at data but during their work they had the opportunity to, an extended opportunity I might say, to review the US official data and they had the opportunity of questioning on this matter. So I believe that everything was done which possibly could be done by these independent bodies, and I repeat, doing their work without any riding instructions from the Government.

JOURNALIST: When you say you're going to release the substance of the reports, does that mean you won't be releasing the full reports?

PM: Well it may be that we will. All I'm saying is that at this point I want to have some further discussion with my colleagues because I don't want just to sit here unilaterally and say yes that's what will happen. I want to have some discussion. But I'm simply saying that my predisposition is towards releasing them.

JOURNALIST: The full reports?

PM: I would think so. I'd need to take some advice and have some discussion of it but that's my predisposition, yes.

JOURNALIST: What ... CSIRO comment on the fact that the environmental impact statement from the US army actually says that they will not have to comply with the US Federal Clean Air Act and the US Federal Land Conservation Act?

PM: All I can say is that, having read the CSIRO report, it was quite clear that the CSIRO report comes down on the favour of the proposition that the methods that are being employed there represent the best of techniques

that are available when, taking all the considerations into account, it should be supported.

JOURNALIST: Is the Australia-New Zealand position so identical that you agree with Mr Palmer that you would eventually like to see that facility disappear so that it no longer acted as an attraction for people who might want to dispose of other wastes?

PM: The answer to that question follows from what I said earlier, that there are three categories of material that will be involved in the facility at Johnston Atoll. I repeat, what's on the atoll now, material that's still in other parts of the Pacific and material from the Federal Republic of Germany. Our view is that that and no other should be the subject of the processes there.

JOURNALIST: So does that mean the New Zealand-Australian positions are identical?

PM: I gather from the discussions that I've had with the Prime Minister of New Zealand that our positions are identical. But I'm not here to speak for the Prime Minister of New Zealand. I think you're going to have the pleasure of questioning him in about five minutes or so. It's appropriate that if you want to know the New Zealand position you ask the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

JOURNALIST: Within the limitations that you've just outlined about the use of Johnston Atoll, will you be pushing for, or seeking to have an expression of support for that chemical weapons disposal process in the final Forum communique?

PM: Well it's on the agenda here. I'll be putting my view as to what I think is the appropriate position. I'll listen to what my friends in the Forum have to say. In the light of all the discussion I'll be then, within the Forum, expressing what I think would be the appropriate Forum position to be put. We'll see what happens in the debate about that. But clearly I haven't come here just to say well that's what we think, and leave it at that. Because I believe that we have been given advice which is objective and appropriate as a position to be adopted. I will be saying that I think that ought to be the Forum position but I want to hear what the others have to say.

JOURNALIST: At this stage does it appear that it's just you and, well you think New Zealand is behind you, do you think it's just you and New Zealand against the rest of the Forum members or do you know from discussions that there are other Pacific Island Countries that support your view?

PM: Not all the Forum leaders were at the Retreat so I can't answer that question with precision. I would have

to say on the evidence of the Retreat that there were question marks and serious question marks being raised by a significant number of our colleagues. But that was a very preliminary stage. I haven't had the opportunity of hearing a detailed exposition of our scientific reports. So what their view will be at the end of the debate I really can't say.

JOURNALIST: Did the US ask Australia to assist in reassuring South Pacific Forum members ...?

PM: There was no specific request to me. I have no doubt that in the discussions that have taken place at other levels between officials and so on that there would have been a view put that they thought that this was the right position, that they hoped we'd be able to support it. But I've had no direct request to that effect. I don't operate on this basis. I mean no-one determines Australia's position for it. We're not here as an intermediary for the United States or anyone else. I make up my mind on the basis of material put before me, whether it's on this issue or any other that's here, or like on the discussion that we've had this morning in the Forum about dialogue partners. I make up my mind on the basis of what I think is the correct position and then put that. I'm not here, as I say, as a surrogate for or an intermediary for anyone.

JOURNALIST: On the question of the move at the Forum this morning for Taiwan to join the post-Forum dialogue, do you have a comment on this and does it complicate Australia's one-China policy?

PM: No, I'm very pleased to say that the position that I espoused on this is the one that has been embraced by the Forum. I made the point that I think it's a fundamental principle of the Forum that the Forum doesn't seek to impose decisions on its members which can infringe the foreign policy rights of individual members. The facts are that as far as the Forum is concerned there are some countries, like for instance ourselves, New Zealand, Vanuatu, who recognise one government of China, the Peoples Republic, mainland China. There are others who have not adopted that position, as is their right. It was therefore my judgement, and the view that the Forum adopted, that it was not appropriate to make a decision in terms of inviting Taiwan as a dialogue partner which would in fact impinge upon and derogate from the rights of individual members. Rather I think they've adopted the eminently sensible position to say well let this issue be examined in the next twelve months and particularly let it be examined in the light of whether APEC may in fact find some formula which can accommodate acceptable positions. That seems to me to be the right approach. It's certainly the one which I advocated.

JOURNALIST: From your knowledge of the American position on Johnston Island, do you believe that they would be

prepared to reconsider their plans if the Forum didn't like them or is it a fait accompli?

PM: There are two things that have to be said which are relevant to that. Firstly that there is a testing period which has to be followed and we would be - and the second is related to it - that I certainly would be advocating that the Forum send a scientific mission to the facility to examine it. Let me say this, that if out of that testing period and the examination of the facility by a Forum scientific group, if out of those processes any serious question were to arise as to the adequacy and safety of the operation of the facility then it would be right that the Forum, including Australia, should press strongly on the United States that they should not go ahead, at least should not go ahead without modification. That would be Australia's position and I presume it would be that of the Forum. But whether, I mean they have said that a) that this testing period is going ahead, and b) have indicated that they would welcome a Forum scientific mission. I would expect, as I say, if out of those two processes serious questions were raised then they should be asked to consider modifications. I don't believe that they're going to be doing those two things without some serious purpose. There's no point in having a testing period or inviting a scientific mission if you're not going to allow the possibility emerging out of those things for some modification.

JOURNALIST: Can I just go back to Bougainville for a second. I think you mentioned earlier that you saw some difficulties in the negotiating process. Are you able to say what those difficulties are that you see and on balance are you optimistic about ...?

PM: The answer to that Glenn is yes I'm able to but I'm going to because the information that I have is in confidence at this stage. It would not be appropriate.

JOURNALIST: You very benevolently last night broke your London convention to give us a short statement on the Hogg initiative -

PM: It was a very very brief and considered and complete breaking of it to which nothing is to be added.

JOURNALIST: Not even to give us any indication -

PM: Not even to do anything, not even to your blandishments.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, on the Australian scientific report, would there have been more benefit if that assessment was made available to Forum nations earlier, even if it was only last week, so they would have had more time to examine the details rather than having to do it at the Forum itself?

PM: I think the nature of the reports are such that they are capable of analysis and understanding reasonably quickly.

JOURNALIST: New Zealand and Australia take a similar line on issues such as Johnston Atoll and Fiji even though it's not on the agenda. Do you think the two of you run the risk of giving the impression that you're trying to heavy the rest of the members?

PM: Certainly not. If you were able to hear them for the way we put our contributions, we don't put them in the sense of trying to heavy. I mean let me make this point, as I have before, at previous Forums. Again I don't speak for New Zealand, that's the right and duty of my friend Geoffrey Palmer. But let me say this for Australia. We have a line, a difficult line at times, that we have to walk. That is we are the largest, most economically powerful, most resource rich country of the Forum, and that's acknowledged. And I believe that we have, that there are great responsibilities that flow from that fact and not the least of those responsibilities is the obligation that we have to provide aid in financial terms, in material resource terms and in personnel terms to the smaller members of the Forum. That's in my judgement a responsibility and obligation that we have. The line we have to walk - and I always try and make sure that that line is adhered to - is in accepting that responsibility and then on the other side not to think that that gives us some right to impose our views on the Forum. That's a difficult line but it's one which from 1983 I've steadfastly and assiduously tried to walk and I hope successfully.

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