



17

PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT NEWS CONFERENCE WITH PREMIER WAYNE GOSS, BRISBANE AIRPORT, 16 NOVEMBER 1990

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: What is the significance, Prime Minister, of this agreement as far as Commonwealth-State relations are concerned?

PM: Well the significance is that after three years of attempting to get a position where there would be effective management and protection of the World Heritage area in the Wet Tropics of Queensland, we've demonstrated that now that with the election of Wayne Goss and the Labor Government in December of last year that the interests of the people, not just of Queensland but of Australia, have been put first. With the election of Wayne we were able to put behind us all the negativism of the past of the previous Queensland Government and we sat down and in March of this year we reached the initial agreement and now this is the culmination of that agreement which we tentatively reached then and under which Queensland will undertake the responsibility of the day to day management of the Wet Tropics area. Together we will be putting in a substantial amount of money, I think about \$11M this year, Wayne, from the Commonwealth and the State Government to ensure that for this and future generations this great natural resource is going to be nurtured and protected and made available for enjoyment by not only the people of Australia but I think an increasing number of people from overseas. It's a very important day and I want to express my sincere gratitude to Wayne Goss and the Government of Queensland for the fulsome cooperation that they've extended which has enabled us to reach this important day.

GOSS: From our point of view this is a very important day not just for Queensland but, I think, for Australia because the Wet Tropics are of national and indeed international significance and they are now secured, their future is secured by this agreement and by what I think is a remarkable cooperative arrangement between the Commonwealth Government and Queensland. There are a lot of people in the National Party who are claiming that come this day the Wet Tropics were going to be annexed by Canberra. Well Bob's given me an assurance they're not going to tow it away, it's going to be left in North Queensland and it is going to be what we all want it to be, and that is one of the most magnificent areas in the

country properly managed. I mean the past three years have seen a brawl, they've seen the Wet Tropics under threat, we've seen millions of dollars wasted on legal challenges. The future sees those millions of dollars going in on a joint basis by the Commonwealth and the State to manage and protect the Wet Tropics long term.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Premier Goss has organised a summit, an environment summit, for next year to look at dispute settling procedures. Would you like to endorse that summit and perhaps see any national bipartisan agreement or any agreement might come out of that?

PM: Well there are two things to say. I mean history in a sense is overtaking us. Firstly, that Wayne and I have talked about this and we would want to be cooperative and involved. Secondly, of course, at the Special Premiers' Conference which we held up here just very recently and which Wayne and the Queensland Government did so much to make it a success by their pre-organisation for it, at that we agreed again on the need for Commonwealth-State cooperation in these areas. What we have now is a position of common ground where we recognise the responsibility that Government have as well as for economic development which we share. We also have a responsibility for making the right decisions about protecting the environment. We recognise that there are areas of shared responsibility and we want to make sure that we have effective complementarity between the things that we do so that (a) it's effective in terms of discharging the obligation we have in protecting the environment. And (b) in respect of the legitimate development which must take place in this country that we put the least unnecessary impediments in the way by duplication and unnecessary doubling up of processes. I think we are at one on that.

GOSS: Absolutely. I think the other thing that you should know is that during the Premiers' Conference I had private talks with Bob in relation to the Conference and secured his approval for the Commonwealth Government's Ambassador on the Environment, Sir Ninian Stephen, and the Federal Environment Minister, Ros Kelly, to participate in the conference.

JOURNALIST: ... noisy brawls previously are now costing Australia and Queensland tens of millions of dollars and knocking the confidence of investors coming here ...

PM: I think it's true to say that the lack of - there are two things I think are relevant in answer to your question. I think in the past, particularly in regard to Queensland, the siege mentality that existed on the part of the previous government who wouldn't accept the bona fides of the Federal Government created an atmosphere, a poisonous atmosphere which would certainly have worried people who were concerned about the future, either from

an environmental sense or from a developmental sense. I think that's true. Secondly, I would say that the rather ad hoc nature of approach that had necessarily been adopted in the past was something that gave rise to uncertainty and that's why we at our level and Wayne, of course, at his level has been doing things as well. But at our level we've tried to introduce a certainty of process now. There are three elements to that. We've set up the Resource Assessment Commission so that we're going to be able to on these broad issues give the opportunity for developers, environmentalists, State Governments, unions and business to actually have an input into the consideration of these broad issues. Secondly, we've set up the ecologically sustainable development processes in specific sectors of industry which will report to us by the end of the year. We've got the cooperation and involvement of the State Governments in that. So that at the end of that process I hope we'll be able cooperatively to lay down clear guidelines and principles which will be available to everyone. The third point, of course as I've said, is the cooperation we now have out of the Special Brisbane Conference with the States which I think will mean that everyone concerned in this area, both those whose emphasis is the environment and those who are concerned with development, will know that there is a clear cut relationship and a complementarity between Commonwealth and State approaches on these issues. So whether you look at any one of those issues, the existence of a sort of troglodyte government in the past up here, that's fixed. The emergence of Wayne and the Labor Government and the actual processes have been rectified and the basis of cooperation established.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, ... going soft on environmental concerns since the election from some environmental quarters. Can you wear that criticism?

PM: I can wear criticism which ever side it comes from. I mean I think Wayne in your now relatively short period in Government has come to recognise, and indeed we've talked about it, but in these sort of areas you can never have 100% wins. You will never really totally satisfy some people in the environment movement whose agenda is almost limitless. I don't say that in a hectoring way. In fact in respect of a lot of them I don't question their integrity but they do have, many of them, a fairly elastic agenda and you will never totally satisfy them. On the side of some people it's dig up anything, cut down everything. Now those sort of red-neck developers, you'll never satisfy them.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister -

PM: If I could make a final point. What you've got to do as Wayne was trying to do here, we're trying to do federally, is you've got to establish a process which gives opportunity to the interest groups to express their

point of view. Once you've established that process so it's not just a system of ad hockery, then I think you're well on the way to not satisfying everyone but at least everyone knows where they are.

GOSS: I think what this agreement's about is that I mean, on either extreme with the development and the environmental lobby you'll always get complaints about governments. But by this sort of cooperative approach, by trying to get results, you get the right balance and the broad public want to see that. That's what I think we've got to achieve as Government.

JOURNALIST: Who does more harm, the radical greenies or the red-neck developers?

PM: I think that's a pointless question and I know you're asking it for constructive purposes. ... bona fides in that respect. But I think in some circumstances one would say that the position of the environmentalists is the harder to sustain on a particular issue. On others the environmentalists are basically right and the developers who'll want to do that particular thing haven't thought it through correctly. I mean there is no overall judgement to be made about that, I think.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what was the substance of your talks last night with President Bush?

PM: The main purpose of my call, we spoke the best part of half an hour, was the Uruguay Round because I wanted to convey to the President the profound concern that I feel about the sense of crisis and the reality of crisis which has developed in the Uruguay Round talks. They were scheduled to complete in the week commencing the 3rd December in Brussels. That was to be the final week. Now on the situation that's been created by the European Community where they put a totally unrealistic offer on the table which is totally prejudicial to the interests of Australia and the Cairns Group and particularly of our rural producers, I was not prepared to sit by and just say well all is lost. The basic point that George Bush and I discussed was the need to inject now into these latter stages of the Round, political clout, that the negotiating Ministers must know that at the Heads of Government level there is a concern that we are facing not merely a potential economic crisis but a political crisis because if the world doesn't come to sensible decisions to create a freed up, liberalised, international trading system then the losses are not merely economic but they will have profound political implications. So we talked about that and how we can get more political input and impetus to the process.

JOURNALIST: Did he give you some sort of indication that he'd be taking some sort of decisive action to overcome the impasse?

PM: He outlined actions that he was taking. He'd just within the previous 24 hours, he'd had meetings with the Lords of the European Community and the Commission and the Italian leadership and he also indicated to me at that time that Secretary of State Baker was going to be engaged in bilateral discussions with the European leaders on this issue. So he and I are at one on the understanding of the dimension of the crisis and the need to exert leadership and we have undertaken to continue to be in contact about what comes through from these initiatives that he's taking, the initiatives that I'll be taking now in contact, direct contact with European leaders. So we are at one on this issue.

JOURNALIST: Have you reached a decision on whether you'll be going personally to Brussels?

PM: No, I won't be going personally to Brussels because at this stage the need is to get into the Brussels meeting and in the minds of the Ministers involved, the political concerns that there is at the Head of Government. So we've injected that. It is possible that if the Brussels meeting doesn't of itself generate discernible progress that we may need to contemplate a Heads of Government meeting subsequent to that and we did have some preliminary discussions about that. He did ask me - what we talked about it was overwhelmingly about the Uruguay Round, as I've explained to you. I, of course, took the opportunity of discussing the Gulf with him and we both affirmed to one another the commitment that we have firstly to the essentiality of the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait and the release of all hostages and the profound hope that we both share that this conclusion can be achieved by peaceful means.

JOURNALIST: Did he seek any greater commitment from Australia if the Gulf war eventuates?

PM: No.

JOURNALIST: And was there any indication from him that the outbreak of hostilities was imminent?

PM: No.

JOURNALIST: Or inevitable?

PM: No.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, apparently last night there was a fairly savage attack on Mr Hewson.

PM: Last night?

JOURNALIST: Or yesterday. Some parties are suggesting that maybe you and Mr Keating were ...

PM: Yes, some people would want to do that to avoid the

realities. I mean if you're on weak ground you always seek to divert attention from weakness by suggesting that there has been some lack of gentlemanliness in the attack that's been made. The realities, of course, are that Dr Hewson is the pathetically weak leader of not just an irrelevant Opposition but a dangerous Opposition. That has been made clear by myself and Paul Keating in two distinct areas. In the area of economic policy he's been exposed as a man who, as Paul Keating graphically but rightly put it, will roar like a lion at his doorstep interviews and say we must cut Government expenditure, \$3B. But when the chips are down on an issue which would've immediately in this year saved \$25M or \$57M in a full year, he goes in and puts the proposition of support for the Government in his Caucus, but then rolls over and allows himself to be done, doesn't fight for it and indeed so weak is his attitude in his own Party room, that it becomes a matter of comment to the media by his colleagues. Now that's something that you should attack in Government. I mean if you are concerned about responsible economic management then you can't afford, in our judgement, to tolerate such weakness and hypocrisy on the part of the Opposition and its leadership. To expose that is not going over the top, to expose that is our responsibility. And I said there were two areas. Secondly, the area of foreign affairs. I mean we had the ridiculous situation which emerged yesterday that we have the Opposition in this country now attacking not simply Nelson Mandela and those who fought against apartheid, but we now have them attacking the President of South Africa and accusing him of playing favourites because he has chosen as his interlocker, Nelson Mandela. These things, you know, are just ridiculous intrinsically but they are also dangerous for Australia.

PM: Prime Minister, Keith Wright this morning has said that he will be defecting factions. Are you concerned about what appears to be growing factionalism? I mean that's three MPs now who have indicated -

PM: That's not growing factionalism, it's a bit of a reshuffling of the pack.

JOURNALIST: inaudible

PM: It's not unseemly at all. I mean I think that if Keith believes that he will be more comfortable in the Left then that's a decision that I can live with and presumably the Left is able to live with. That's alright with me. He will be continuing to be a good representative for his electorate and making a good contribution in the Parliament. You see, what we've got in the Labor Party is a system that's not perfect. I mean I've had my things to say about us and the factional system has never worked perfectly. But see what you've got to understand is the difference between Labor and the conservatives is this; Labor is about change, Labor never accepts that society as it is is perfect. We believe

that it always can be improved. That's why we now are on the eve - and it's appropriate to say it here in this great State of Queensland which was in so many ways the cradle of the birth of Labor - we are now on the eve of the centenary of the Labor Party, unchanged in name and unchanged in commitment. That commitment is to change and improve society. Now when you have that sort of Party you have within it people who have causes and concerns and some people will want to deal faster with some issues than with others. Now the way that's worked out is that people are in the factional groups but they're united, united about wanting to affect a better society. That's Labor. On the other side all you have is this mindless, grasping back for the past of wanting to restore things that are unrestorable and shouldn't be restored. So you get changes of names in the conservatives, they change their name, change their leaders. In a sense, nothing changes with them. I can live with these things.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, factionalism hasn't been a problem in the federal sphere yet it was so divisive for the Labor Party here in Queensland for so many years. Are you worried that it could become divisive at the federal level?

PM: No it won't become divisive. I mean we get value out of the faction system. It is a way in which you know who to deal with and instead of having to say well now you know some people have got a different point of view and they've got a different point view, but with the factional system at least you've got a method of organisation. As I say, let me make it quite clear, the faction system isn't perfect and it can cause problems at times. But we've shown now in nearly 8 years of Government how it can be a force for good and Wayne Goss here in Queensland is sitting in control of the situation, he recognises that groups exist and he's able to work with them.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, the Australian Embassy official who last year apparently took to two Chinese refugees with a stockwhip and an air pistol has been let off with a fine of \$350, demoted but he still remains in the Department. Isn't that fairly lenient?

PM: It seems on the face to be reasonably lenient. I've just been made aware of this issue. I'll talk about it at the appropriate time with the Minister, Senator Evans. On the face of it it does seem rather lenient but I would want to know all the circumstances.

JOURNALIST: inaudible

PM: Sure. On the face of it it wasn't very acceptable behaviour. I'm not trying to defend it in any way.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, the Charles Blunt postage problem.

Do you regret stirring up that hornets nest?

PM: Do I regret stirring it up? No, I've no problem but I bet Charlie does.

JOURNALIST: Did you expect it to go as far as it has now with allegations of -

PM: I'm an innocent in these sort of things. I mean I just had a question asked of me there in Question Time. I mean there must be a - did they ask that question? They did and so I discharged my obligations of having the information obtained and up it comes - \$278,000. A lot of licks.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, will you be having any more talks with George Bush in the near future?

PM: It's quite possible. I mean he expressed his pleasure that I'd rung him and that we'd had the opportunity of conversation and he undertook that we'd be staying in contact. Now whether that means any more phone calls in the near future or handling it through our diplomatic representatives but we are going to stay closely in touch on the issue. It's very important for Australia's farmers that we do.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, just back to Charles Blunt. Is there any ... or any ground for legal action or recovery of those monies that ...

PM: I don't know. I haven't involved myself in that matter. That's something for the relevant Ministers and Departments. I haven't intervened in that at all.

ends