



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
PRESS CONFERENCE, CANBERRA  
13 MARCH 1992

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PM: Ladies and gentlemen, I just thought that I'd give you a few preliminary comments and then you can address questions to me. I thought I'd begin by just asking Australians to reflect upon how the families of Lloyd Boney and David Gundy must feel this morning at seeing these depictions. And I ask them to reflect on what all Aboriginal people must feel at this disgrace, at this treatment of them. And I ask Australians how can we hope to have pride in ourselves when we debase our values in this way? Because these people in doing what they have done, have in fact been disloyal to the whole concept of Australia and the way non-Aboriginal Australians should relate to Aboriginal Australians. And I ask to let this incident be a turning point, a turning point in the way we view this country, and that is a turning point in us vowing to eliminate racism from every corner of Australian life.

J: Prime Minister, what do you say further to Australians who like one of the police officers involved in this incident, describe it as 'a bit of harmless fun'?

PM: Well, I think it is the most disgraceful taunt I have seen. The notion of someone mocked up as an Aboriginal with a rope around their neck is just about the most disgraceful taunt of a race of people as I can imagine.

J: Doesn't it, though, reflect a more pervasive attitude within the community, it's not simply two police officers doing this, this is actually an attitude which is quite widespread in Australia isn't it, this attitude to Aboriginals?

PM: There may be, that could well be true, but it has never in my memory manifested itself quite in this way. But I think, as I said, we should make this a turning point. We should decide that we should expunge racism

of every corner of this country to decide that the notion of Australia, the notion of this country, what Australia is about is not about this kind of behaviour, it is not about this kind of racism and to do this is actually being disloyal to Australia.

J: Prime Minister, is there any suggestion that these men, whom you've described as a disgrace to Australia, a national disgrace, have done anything other than with bad taste? Is there any suggestion they have assaulted an Aboriginal, responsible for the death of an Aboriginal, assaulted anybody else, committed any criminal behaviour?

PM: Well, they have held, I believe, at a critical time in the history of relations between non-Aboriginal Australians and Aboriginals they've held Aboriginals up to ridicule and contempt.

J: Prime Minister, you've been talking a lot about identity recently. Do you think this is one problem we have with our own identity, that we often don't like what we see in ourselves?

PM: Well, I think many Australian have not come to terms with Australia, not come to terms with the place. And part of coming to terms with it is a genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal-Australians and non-Aboriginal Australians. And that's very much what the process of reconciliation is about - to try and remove these attitudes to let non-Aboriginal Australians know that we can't live in this way and can't behave in this way.

J: Prime Minister, Michael Tate this morning said that this video would make Australia a laughing stock whenever we tried representing other countries with human, or other people that are suffering human rights abuses, and that the regimes responsible for those abuses would simply toss this video back in our face. Can you see it damaging our reputation?

PM: Well, it is certainly not going to help us. And even though I think most Australians are very conscientious about this problem and Governments have sought to do much about it, the issue is as much up here as it is in the government expenditure or the programs. It is an attitudinal problem, it is an attitudinal problem, let's hope this incident will shape the attitudes of Australians about it.

J: In the statement that you released on this issue, you said that it was incumbent effectively on white Australians to close the gap in living standards and to change attitudes. How does that sit with your Cabinet's decision to slash quite a considerable amount of the amount of money that Robert Tickner, the

Aboriginal Affairs Minister, was seeking for Aborigines?

- PM: Well, we've only announced part of that package and that is the law and justice component of the response to the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Royal Commission. But I think it is very important that all levels of Government concentrate on this and one of the things which I will be doing is also talking to the States about their role in this, their response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission, their response to the ongoing problems of living standards of Aborigines and in part the, if you like second part, of what will be presented by the Government in relation to the response to the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and ongoing underlying causes of the problem will be that which is concluded between the Commonwealth and the States. We don't want simply minimalist efforts on the part of the States in response to this problem. And for the Commonwealth to take the view that it's going to accept simply a minimalist effort on the part of the States, both attitudinally and in programs, is I think not doing the problem of justice. So that's why the Government will be engaging the States as well as looking itself more comprehensively at whatever package we finally announce.
- J: So we can expect the full \$500 million plus ...
- PM: You can expect a statement of substance from the Government at the time the Government wishes to deliver it.
- J: Mr Keating, won't this damage Australia's international reputation?
- PM: Well that's what you just asked me.
- J: Mr Keating, will this engagement of the States be after the 31 March statement?
- PM: It will be between now and then and probably beyond then, because this is a problem of some complexity in terms of particularly programs and other issues, other, if you like, causal links to this problem. So we will be responding the first instance to the law and justice elements to the recommendations.
- J: Mr Keating won't you require on national response, though, from the Federal Government, because we have got problems like this in New South Wales and also similar problems going on in Western Australia? State Governments don't see capable of dealing with it?
- PM: This is a very long running Royal Commission, its recommendations are very comprehensive, I think they've been taken up seriously by the States, and I spoke to Robert Tickner this morning and he's spoken to the New

South Wales Police Minister and Police Commissioner and they have indicated they will be responding seriously to the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

- J: Mr Keating, what sort of things do you expect the States to do to show the bonafides that they are responding in more than a minimalist way?
- PM: The whole living standards, sort of attitudinal issues involved here are complex, and there is no way I can just reel off in a second or in a minute or in 10 minutes responses which I think the States should make. But we will be talking to the States about it. But again, there is a heavy responsibility here on the Commonwealth. This will probably be the Commonwealth's, certainly I think last opportunity in this decade, to do something really substantial about this problem and we are determined to think about it and get it as right as we can get it.
- J: Do you believe that the electorate, the fact that it may present, the enormous amount of money that successive Governments have spent on Aboriginal Affairs and seemingly to no effect?
- PM: I don't believe it is to no effect, but certainly we haven't dealt with the problem adequately. It is as much about attitude as it is about money, as I think this incident demonstrates. But again program helps, good program design helps and obviously comprehension of Aboriginal problems helps and trying to bring that coincidence of a delineational problem and program delivery is obviously going to help. I don't think Australians share the view that too much has been spent here. When the referendum came in 1967, I think it was, then non-Aboriginal Australians made their position quite clear about the welfare of Aboriginals and where they saw constitutional responsibility as being. And I think governments in the past, and certainly this Government, this Government has very strongly increased funding to Aboriginal programs over the period and I don't believe that non-Aboriginal Australians should or can take the view that the money that has been spent has been spent unwisely or in any way in terms of its volume and size, in a way which is inconsistent with the problem.
- J: Mr Keating, Charles Perkins agrees that we have an attitudinal problem with Aborigines and he says the only way we can start to solve that is to look at a treaty. Do you think these sorts of events add any weight to that argument?
- PM: Look, I think the Reconciliation Council process is going to be terribly important here. To actually get down to some of these attitudinal issues, to discuss them, to find ways of dealing with them, to think about bringing living standards of Aboriginal people up and

their opportunities, it is closing that gap between living standards and opportunities which will do more than anything else to relieve this problem. And that's something which can be a function of the Government through ATSIC, it can be a function of the States, it can be a function of the Reconciliation Council. These are the things I think we've got to work on.

J: So you still don't think a final document would make an ...?

PM: Well, with the attitudes which are bound in evidence today, I think that is correct. And that's why I think the role of the Reconciliation Council is going to be important and I want to see some material change in living conditions, bringing up the opportunities in living standards for Aboriginals and because I believe that will do more than anything else to relieve the notion of the burden of this problem.

J: Isn't there a danger in spending more money, particularly in the time of high unemployment that all you'll achieve in fact is to bring greater resentment within the white community, as indeed happened to a certain extent say in the United States with the greater spending on the black community there, and the polarisation between black and white?

PM: I think look, I'm simply relying on my memory, but I think the programs amount to about \$5000 per head of the Aboriginal population of Australia, something of that variety. I mean I just don't accept the analysis that that's spent thrift, extravagant, and to be resented by a non-Aboriginal Australians. I just don't think it is true. But as I say, the problem is as much up here as it is in the programs and the living standards and we have to, I think, come to terms with it and deal with it before we will ever understand what Australia is and can be.

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