



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
INTERVIEW WITH STAN GRANT, REAL LIFE
13 MARCH 1992

E&OE PROOF COPY

SG: Prime Minister welcome. It makes your job of pursuing a one Australia vision pretty difficult, when people have attitudes like those displayed by the two police officers doesn't it?

PM: I think that is true. There can't be any concept of 'One Nation' until we are, non-Aboriginal Australians are, at peace and come to terms with Aboriginal Australians.

SG: I might be a little bit cynical here Prime Minister, that although what I saw last night disgusted me, and it certainly did, it didn't surprise me, did it really surprise you?

PM: It did actually. I thought these characters were throw-backs. I think Australians have now come to understand more about Aboriginal culture, are more sympathetic now than perhaps they've ever been, more prepared to see change, good change to better intergrate Aboriginal Australians into the broader society. So I actually thought this was something one would expect from another period.

SG: So you don't accept the view put about by a lot of people that what we've seen, not only last night, but the week before with the Redfern police, they're attitudes simply mirroring a deeper attitude felt right through the Australian community. You don't accept that?

PM: I don't think so. No, obviously what we saw the other night on television is there now, this is a year or two ago. The fact is, I think these are still minority attitudes, but the fact that they existed is disturbing

and the whole point of the reconciliation process is to come to terms with those things.

SG: On the matter with the two police individually, do you think they have a right to remain as members of the police force?

PM: Well, I was heartened by the fact that the police Minister in New South Wales told the Aboriginal Affairs Minister this morning that they were going to take some action, I can't remember exactly what they had in mind against the two officers, I think they are standing them down from active duty. And that they would respond seriously to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. So I think New South Wales Government and the New South Wales Police force is taking this very seriously.

SG: There is a greater problem here though, isn't there? Aboriginal Australia tends to lurch from one disaster to another. The Black Deaths in Custody Royal Commission is just one. What is going to happen eventually to improve the loss of Aboriginal Australians, because certainly throwing money at it really hasn't worked, has it?

PM: No, it is much about attitudes that what's in our minds as it is about money. And that's why the Government is taking the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Royal Commission recommendations seriously. We think this is an opportunity perhaps to last in this decade to do something again in material, to materially improve the lot of Aboriginal Australians. And this is our opportunity I think, and we are going to, we are now seriously looking at this, and also enjoining the States to be in it. But it is an attitudinal thing and the poverty of Aboriginal Australians only makes the whole country poorer.

SG: I think back to my childhood, and I look at the situation Aborigines were in then, and you would recall it as well, it hasn't really improved and yet as I say money has been thrown at the problem. And is it fair to say also do you think, that the more money that's thrown at Aborigines causes more resentment in the wider community?

PM: If it does, it's unfair. I mean we spend a little less than \$5,000 per head on the Aboriginal population, and most of it goes into things that matter. I've got a chart here now showing where the money is spent. Only a third of it goes into labour market programs, the rest goes into education, health, housing and community services, industry assistance. I think it is a great shame if Australians believe that this area has been indulged. It isn't. There has to be more done here.

SG: But you would accept that there is that perception, and there is also the perception that a lot of money is wasted by Government agencies and also by Aboriginal groups?

PM: Well, I'd like to think that's not true. One can not be certain about the delivery of any program, but this has been tightened up over the years. But the fact is, we've now as a Government got another chance to look at the delivery of Aboriginal programs in response to the Royal Commission, and we're doing that. We'll be engaging the States as well. And, through the broader process, the reconciliation process, that we can actually come to terms with it attitudinally, as well as in program delivery.

SG: On the issue of the Royal Commission, now \$500 million was recommended by the Royal Commission to be put into that area. What is being done there, because only half of that money has actually been approved by the Government hasn't it?

PM: Well, the Royal Commission didn't recommend an amount of money. It's a matter for the Government to respond. What we'll be doing, in the first instance, responding to the law and justice recommendations of the Royal Commission, and adequately funding those changes to make sure those recommendations are met. But if we go beyond that and look at the underlying causes and reasons in poverty or opportunity, or lack of opportunity which exists, lack of employment opportunities which exist for Aboriginal people, if we look at those issues, they'll be the subject of a second statement to Parliament. And we're now looking to make sure that that statement is right - that what we do does, when I say right, as best we can, design those programs to be of most assistance to Aboriginal people.

SG: Prime Minister, just finally and fairly quickly, has what you've seen over the last week, has that spurred you on to any greater heights to really finally do something about this? Can you now set some sort of timetable where you can say in 18 months that these attitudes that now exist are now going to be gone?

PM: Well, I don't think I can say that, but we've got to continue to work at it. But the fact is that non-Aboriginal Australians must come to terms with the poverty of Aboriginal Australians and the inequality of their opportunities. And until we do, we won't be able to claim the name, the notion of 'One Nation', and therefore it is a matter of great urgency for us as a society. And, I for one will be taking this opportunity we have with the Royal Commission's recommendations seriously, and this very untimely incident only encourages me in that exercise.