



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
LAUNCH OF TERRY AULICH'S BOOK "THE RIVER'S END"
26 NOVEMBER 1992**

E&OE PROOF COPY

PM: Well thank you very much I am quite happy to be associated on this occasion with Kerr publishing and most particularly with my friend and colleague, Terry Aulich. On this very novel occasion for the Parliament because we believe that this is the first novel written by a member of Parliament since Federation, which makes it something of an event.

You have got to say one thing about the Labor Party - we can breed all the varieties - we are the entrepreneurs, the adventurers, the romantics of Australian politics. And in that high tradition we have produced Brother Aulich. He has brought to the public a very interesting novel. It is interesting because it is about something which is not quite a contemporary issue, but it is not that long ago that it was, a decade ago. The issue of the Franklin River and its possible damming, something which divided our national life which caused the fall of a Government in Tasmania. The first time that a Government actually took on an environment issue in this country and of course changed Tasmania for ever, I won't say for ever, that is too big a claim, at least for the moment. But certainly from the quieter days of Tasmanian life, things changed when the Franklin and the Gordon-below-Franklin debate was on.

The interesting thing about this is as described this book, not simply as fiction but as fact. Half fact, fiction, or fact rolled with fiction, or fiction rolled with fact. And Terry paints quite interesting pen sketches of some of the players, including Doug Lowe, then Premier, who Terry in the past used to describe to me as the sort of boy-next-door type that every mother loved and that every mother wished her daughter to marry. Well that was a pretty big wrap for Doug, but it didn't do him much good politically when the crunch came.

He lived through this period tumultuously. Of course, one has to know Tasmanian politics to understand just how tightly fought it is, within that Hare Clarke system and those multiple-member constituencies. People of the same party campaign against one another, so it is all hamlet and village-political machination, infighting and the rest. And I had much experience of this when I used to come to Tasmania as the Shadow Minister for Tasmania in the then Opposition in the 1970s, and Terry was the person who used to take me around the State. Terry always had a good automobile under him and we used to – he likes the good things in life Terry – and we dashed up and down Tasmania; Fingal, up the top, and one day right down the full length of the State to two or three things, we were stopping at all these villages .. we will just stop in here, two drinks, be seen at the pub, say hello, out we go, back in the car and off again. He had this sort of death defying struggle with the dreaded Michael Polley, who he shared a place with in the same constituency and it was the fox eyeing off the fox and how one would garner support within this constituency. Now you can just imagine an issue like the Franklin River dropped into the middle of this minutia of political manoeuvrings that went on, and of course it was really something which was cathartic to the political system.

What's nice about this book is that Terry has written about it in a way that only somebody as involved as he was could write about it. Someone who actually knew about it, knew about all those little internecine battles, all those little jealousies, past rebukes never to be forgotten, all that sort of stuff. And he has it here woven into a story which I think tells a very nice tale about a big Australian national issue. That's a very good thing to do and of course it is a most unpretentious book, and that is in keeping with Terry himself who is certainly not a pretentious person. He is good humoured and he does like a laugh and he has that mocking style and all the time I have ever known him he has always sent up all the personalities around him and has never taken the whole thing all that seriously. Now that comes through, which is a very good way to be, a very good way to be, particularly in public life, and that comes through in the book, and I mean there are just some very nice sort of .. this could only be written by an Australian as, "Sinbad was a born victim, he had a certain style which didn't go unnoticed." "There was a sudden intake of breath, a cross between a honk and a snort", it goes on, "she's a bit on the skittish side and that right fetlock is still troubling her", or, "you are seeing a lot of that McMillan bird" (bird is an old word now in Australia) but "Kerry Wade said plonking his bum on my desk". I mean it is not really James Joyce, but nor is it oblique and distended like Patrick White. So, this is very readable and while it may not be knocking on the door for a Booker prize, it's certainly a very nice piece of writing about Australia and the Australia that we all know.

It is interesting that Terry has, it's one of a trilogy of books, he has two others completed and in the course of publication, and it's again quite interesting that somebody who has been involved in public life as much as he has has been able still to turn his mind to a subject like this and get himself published and have two

other books at the ready as well. So, I think this is going to be a joy for many of us, particularly in political system and journalists, to read. Terry has had a bent for prose with poetry and writing over the years and I think that many of us who are ourselves victims of the system of politics will find this a really good read.

So Terry, congratulations on putting it together, it is a very readable book, it spins a very nice tale, it paints tremendous pen portraits of the characters, Patrick Kennedy reads like a refugee from the NSW Labor Party, but I don't know whether that is true, and he certainly found his way around Tasmania. Congratulations again, Terry, I hope the book succeeds, it deserves to, it occupies a unique place in the history of this place and the fact that you are the first as we understand it, the first MP to have published a novel and not just one but three. Congratulations to McMillan an Australia publishing company for publishing it. Good luck to all concerned.