



PRIME MINISTER

**FULL TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING,
MP
INTERVIEW WITH MIKE WILLESEE, A CURRENT AFFAIR, NINE
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MW: Prime Minister, thanks for your time.

PM: Good, Michael.

MW: You have had varying degrees of opposition and concern about the Mabo decision, but now in Hugh Morgan you have someone prepared to lead a campaign which says that in every respect Mabo is wrong and dangerous.

PM: Well, there will always be a view put at the extremes of any of these arguments and I think the important thing is for Australians not to be distracted by that view. I mean it is a minority view, I think, it is wrong, it is entirely wrong, it is technically wrong, that's the key point. The important thing is that the rest of the country gets on and builds a proper administrative structure just to see this decision of the High Court's handled and to see justice done to Aboriginal Australians, and particularly, and as importantly, to see the whole community of Australia realise that we can't build our society in the future on a lie.

MW: What does this mean in political terms, because even National Party leader, Tim Fischer, concedes there were horrific massacres and concedes the Aborigines did have culture?

PM: That is true. The concept which the High Court overturned - this is the concept of Terra nullius, land of no one - was in legal terms a lie. We have been trying to build a nation on that lie for a couple of hundred years. Well of course it wasn't a land of no one, it was a land of the Aboriginal people. Now, in other countries treaties were signed, in fact even in Captain Cook's Instructions from the Admiralty he was asked to

lay claim to parts of the country with the consent of the natives. The key word being consent. Well, none of that was ever done, and now perhaps later rather than earlier, but better late than never, a decision has been made which says there is a native title in the common law. The key point is, Michael, that we can now get on and give those Aboriginals who still live and have associations with the land, title to the land. But where a State land manager has issued a freehold title, such as one of residence or a mining title, that extinguishes the native title. So, there is no fear for people worrying about their land, their backyards, their et cetera.

- MW:** But there are a lot of fears and a lot of uncertainties, and when Hugh Morgan runs a campaign like this, even with his conflict of interest – running Western Mining Corporation – his emotive claims make it easy to put him down, even lampoon him, but because people are confused and uncertain he can prey upon a lot of fears. That makes your job pretty difficult.
- PM:** It does, but again we can't have good things, that is wholesome changes to the way our society functions derailed or put asunder by these narrow views. The key points for Australians to understand about this decision, first of all there is nothing in it to fear whatsoever. The second point I made to you a moment ago but it is worth reiterating, native title is a title subordinate to the Crown, so where the Crown, or the State, or the Commonwealth has issued titles that extinguishes the native title. So, all of the settled areas of Australia, the freehold titles of Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane et cetera, and the rural lands and the farms of this country. Those titles have extinguished the native title, the only place where native title can be claimed and awarded is where we have got unalienated Crown land, which is mostly in places remote from the capital cities and towns and where there is still a continuing Aboriginal association or living upon the land.
- MW:** Where there are racist attitudes in Australia, and Hugh Morgan refers to racism quite often, don't you think in those areas Hugh Morgan's views might not be found to be appealing?
- PM:** Well I think probably for anyone who has that kind of view it is tending to confirm their view, but again, I mean you can't build a society and a nation on these sorts of things. I have just come back from China and you look at the huge opportunities in China, Korea and North and South East Asia in particular, we are taken seriously in that part of the world because people see us as a nation of substance and particularly a multicultural country and a nation which has its act together. It will matter very much to us in the future, not just at home where it matters most, but even abroad, that we have this issue with our indigenous people settled. So, calls to narrow sectional views of the variety that Mr Morgan made won't do anyone any good, and at any rate it is historically

wrong. The thing about Mr Morgan's points were the ones you took up yourself, and I might congratulate you on the position you took, and that was to make it very clear that in the historic context he was wrong, but in the technical context he is totally wrong. That is, that this matter can be settled providing we have competent administrative structures there and the Commonwealth is now working on a piece of legislation to do that. One of the things he said was, we can't validate all the titles from 1975. That simply requires an amendment to a Commonwealth, the passage of a piece of Commonwealth legislation, which I told the Premiers I am prepared to do. So you can forget that as a problem as well. So, technically he was wrong, historically he was wrong, but worse than that he doesn't do anything for the peace and good governance of Australia.

MW: In view of the fact that he does have an audience of indeterminate size, may it be, I would like to put a couple of his points to you. He says that Aboriginal demands that a few years ago were laughable have now been given legitimacy by Mabo.

PM: Before they knew that a native title existed in the common law, they sought land because of the spiritual and traditional association of Aboriginal people with the land. It is not the view a non-Aboriginal person has of land, we see it having an aesthetic or an economic use. They have a totally different association with land. Now formerly, they were asking for land rights. That was land conferred on them by the Parliaments of the State and the Commonwealth. Where Mabo is different, it is not a conferred right, it is a more dignified right, it's a right which exists as a right in the common law. But again, it is limited only to where Aboriginal people can prove that they have maintained an association with it, lived on it, or had an economic use with it. And for most Aboriginals, this is the key point, and one that Mr Morgan doesn't acknowledge, most Aboriginals have been pushed off their land and dispossessed of their land, and therefore can not make a native title claim stick.

MW: Morgan says that all property titles in Australia, all, have been devalued as a result.

PM: That is sheer extravagance of language, it is totally untrue. It is absolutely untrue, and it is a statement not worthy of him making.

MW: And he takes up the cry of his people, the guilt industry. What does that mean?

PM: Well it is nothing to do with guilt, it is to do with, as I said before, the lie that sat under the earlier court judgements about the concept of Terra nullius, the Latin for land of no one. I mean it was a land of people when Europeans came here. So to put that right, to set that wrong to a right is not to do as he says.

MW: He says that people in the guilt industry have difficulty in understanding that when offered a choice between walking across the desert or riding in a Toyota an Aborigine will choose today to ride in the Toyota. And that can sound pretty stupid, except he has a point that he is aiming at a target audience, he is saying that that necessity of choice means you wipe out the weak culture, the weaker culture. Now there may be an audience for that message out there.

PM: Well, so what's our society built on? The stronger parts of each part of our society wipes out the weaker parts.

MW: I think that is what he is saying.

PM: I am sure you take the view, and I certainly do, one feature of Australia which I think most of the world acknowledges positively and that is the great tolerance of the Australian society. I happen to think that that tolerance comes from a very deep seated sense of democracy. We have such commitments to democracy in this country that people accept the right of other people to be different. But if we get to the stage of saying tolerance goes and it is only the strong that prosper economically and socially, God help us as a society. In other words these wealthy people who think they can put themselves up in their places with barbed wire round their front yards, that's what they would end up with in the sort of society that Mr Morgan wants to tell us that exists. It is a very, very narrow view.

MW: That is the basic underlying message isn't it? That they were going to die out anyway, so let's not have any guilt industry.

PM: Yes, well so what do we do, as you said I think very poignantly to Mr Fischer, well what if some other stronger society wants to impact themselves upon us, would we accept that we should give way to them. At what stage do the individual rights and dignity of the human person matter. At what stage do we say our society is built on a sense of democracy and a right of dignity for each person. I mean that's what makes our society tick, not how strong we are, that's not how Australia has come this far for so long. And I should think that it should never change from that.

MW: Prime Minister, I would like to show you now what Mr Morgan had to say about you yesterday.

HM: *The Prime Minister is believed to be a great admirer of Napoleon and one can see similar qualities of leadership in the two men. But I believe there is, that in taking up the cause of Aboriginal separatism that the real agenda of the so-called reconciliation process - the Prime Minister is following Napoleon on the bitter road to Moscow.*

MW: Prime Minister.

PM If there was anyone in that period I should like to take a lesson from it was Thomas Jefferson who was a contemporary of course of Bonaparte's and who drafted the American declaration of Independence with those immortal words 'life, liberty and the pursuit of human happiness'. Now it would do Mr Morgan well to read the US Declaration of Independence and may be as well the Gettysburg Address from President Lincoln to understand what has been the mainstream of endeavour in that country in terms of dealing with indigenous people.

MW: Prime Minister, putting aside Morgan how do you handle those fears and uncertainties that do exist about Mabo in Australia?

PM: To get on with it Michael, the States and the Commonwealth should get on with it and put down a body of administrative law very simply to hear native title claims and when they have been heard and determined to award them. This will happen largely in areas removed from the capital cities and the provincial towns of Australia, removed from the pastoral areas, the freehold areas in particular. It can be done, the framework which I spoke to the Premiers about in Melbourne is a very adoptable one, we have now rejoined in negotiations to try and push that to some sort of finality and rather than regard this as a problem, people should understand it for what it really is and that is an opportunity – an opportunity to set right a wrong, to overturn a legal lie and to actually pull our country together on a basis of equality where the indigenous people of Australia have rights equal to the non-Aboriginal people in this country. There is a huge opportunity for us in this and if we sort this problem out in this country with our indigenous people our reputation and the estimation of those around us in Indonesia, in China, in North and South East Asia will go up even further and have a material, social and economic impact upon us. So it is very important that we get this right and I believe we can, and not just that we will, do it.

MW: Prime Minister, thanks for your time.

PM: Thank you Michael.

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