



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. P. J. KEATING, M.P. DOORSTOP, FAIRBAIRN RAAF BASE, SUNDAY 8 AUGUST 1993.

- J: Prime Minister, you're off to Nauru, is there any hope that you'll be able to settle Australia's long running dispute with that country?
- PM: Well, discussions have been taking place now for some time, months, so there's some prospect that we can get to a settlement yes.
- J: What else is on the agenda for your trip to Nauru?
- PM: Well its the broad agenda of the South Pacific Forum and I think that because we do meet annually we keep fairly abreast of contemporary developments and I think also the value of it is often in the retreat where the various leaders and Prime Ministers can get to talk to one another about issues of concern to them.
- J: Will you be guaging support for a leaders' meeting of APEC countries?
- PM: No I don't think that's going to be a primary issue here but some expression may be given about it, anyway.
- J: How confident are you(inaudible).... be able to solve the problem of Nauru without it having to go back into court?
- PM: I think it's possible to reach a settlement. We are the responders before the International Court of Justice and we know the parameters of this problem from the mining of super phosphate over such a long time and I do think, I'm quite confident we'll be able to reach an amicable scttlement.
- J: -What sort of deal are we offering to them?
- PM: Well, you'll have to wait and see I think.
- J: Prime Minister, what is your reaction to Mr Goss's comments(inaudible)...
- PM: Well I couldn't understand the point of him making them, to be frank. He - I just brought a note on that subject - he said in the Canberra Times, reported

- 2 -

today, he said that he was encouraged and relieved by statements on Friday by the Federal Attorney-General who said the Federal Government is committed to continuing co-operation with Queensland to ensure the Wik people's claims did not jeopardise a major investment project there. Well if he was encouraged and relieved I cannot see the point, when we've been negotiating with him privately in the course of last week and earlier weeks, to come and say things about it publicly.

And could I say that Mr Ralph wrote to me this week saying that: "Our agreement with the Queensland Government calls for decisions to be taken on these proposed investments by the 31st of December next."

There was no mention anywhere of the 20th August so I just don't know where that date comes from at all. You see, this matter, as Mr Ralph says, he says

"The Wik people's claim goes far beyond Mabo." And that's right. Mr Goss has some of the complexion that this is a Mabo matter. This is primarily not a Mabo matter. This is a claim by the Wik peoples claiming a breach of fiduciary responsibility by the State of Queensland as trustees for the Wik peoples' lands. And they're alleging that leases issued by earlier governments - I think the Bjelke-Petersen government - leases which were issued without due consideration of the trusteeship responsibilities of Queensland.

Now, that makes the matter primarily a Queensland problem. Now, to the extent that there is any native title aspects to this the generic legislation the Commonwealth is now considering in respect of Mabo, that will cover this. But, the primary problem here is a claim by the Aboriginal people for a breach of fiduciary responsibility for Queensland and that can run back into the nineteenth century. So, Mr Goss has sort of put the complexion it's up to the Commonwealth. It isn't, it's up to Queensland. And we've said we'll cooperate in looking at it.

But, can I also say that I don't accept that immediately a mining company says something everyone must spring to attention and then extinguish Aboriginal rights. No, the Aboriginal people believe they've got an entitlement to go to the High Court and have these matters tested. Well, I think that is their right but to the extent that these things impinge upon major projects that's a concern too. One has got to get the balance right. But the primary problem here is because the Mabo debate's around and everyone now understands that it's around, it seems for some people relatively easy in the public debate to connect any Aboriginal matter to Mabo. Well, this one is not a primary connection to Mabo. This is a primary connection to the State of Queensland and the execution of its fiduciary responsibilities as trustees to the Wik peoples.

Now, the states are often saying 'states rights this, states rights that' but as soon as there is a problem they come runnin' home to mumma - back to the

- 3 -

Commonwealth. I mean, I get them at the Premiers' conferences and it's all about 'our rights'. But the moment they have a problem it's all up to me and the Commonwealth. Well, the only way to solve these things is cooperatively. And also solving them with an eye to the interests of the mining companies, but also the rights of Aboriginal people to be not just simply extinguished in a relatively thoughtless way to supposedly just facilitate some project. Now this is an important project and because of that we are cooperating in the investigation but the idea that it's going to be all loaded onto the Commonwealth when it's primarily a Queensland problem and the notion that the Commonwealth should indemnify companies for leases signed by the Bjelke-Petersen government is stretching credibility a fair bit, I think.

J: Mr Keating, do you think Malcolm Fraser would make a good President of the Liberal Party?

PM: Well, the Liberal Party has lost its way and Malcolm Fraser sat for seven key years in Australia's post war economic history and let us become an uncompetitive economy relying on minerals and energy and grains and wool. And that let Australia down very badly. And the notion, he rejects the notion of the opening up of Australia's markets; he rejects the notion of a more competitive economy coming from lower protection; he rejects the notion of an open financial market; and if the Liberal Party go back to Malcolm Fraser they're really going back to the past. Now Malcolm's got some views on other things that I don't mind but on primary things, on economic things, that is on things like protection and Australia's future in the world as an open trading society it is a trip down the time tunnel with Malcolm Fraser. But, the Liberal Party too, it keeps going back to its elder statesmen, people. You see this in the New South Wales Liberal Party, you can see it pretty well across the Commonwealth.

J: There's a suggestion that Jeff Kennett might be thinking of entering politics to take over the federal leadership. What do you think of that?

PM: Oh well, we can absorb any culture up here. Even Jeffery.

J: Prime Minister, to the problems of this morning, were there any security problems highlighted by what happened?

PM: No, I don't think so, no. Someone parked a car out the front - but vigilance does matter and that's, I think, all that happened.

ENDS.