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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. P J
KEATING, M.P., PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA
SATURDAY 9 OCTOBER, 1993**

J: Prime Minister, Mr Court said there was no progress. Do you agree with that?

PM: Well, it was a reasonably convivial discussion that we had, and I think that it certainly had a very friendly and cooperative tone. But, the Premier has this view that much of Western Australia will fall to native title - that much of Western Australia's area will be native title. Well, that may in the end be true. That's a matter that was decided by the High Court of Australia, not by me. The question I put to him then, is, "Which way can you bring certainty for the people of Western Australia for the economic use of this land?" I say only via our legislation. The Commonwealth is the only authority which is going to legislate with an eye to the twin objectives of social justice for Aboriginals and a proper system of land management for states. And economic use for states.

And, I explained to him that the economic use part of the bill is exclusively dominated by the states. There is no Commonwealth tribunal there. It's the Mining Board and it's courts - reconfigured but still there - and there is an over-ride by state ministers. So, I said to him, "Where else are you going to get this sort of certainty - if it's not from us, where?". And he says, "Well, I don't like the High Court decision." Well, you know, I don't think the nation is going to overturn the High Court decision.

J: So you're saying he's not facing the facts, then?

PM: Well, he says that state land management should be left to state ministers. Well, this has been, by and large, true - state ministers making grants of interest over Crown land. But a lot of the Crown land will now become native title land - a proportion of it will become native title land because the High Court has said there is a native title in the common law. Now, I don't know what you do about that.

PM: Do you think he understands that or do you think he's playing local politics? Canberra bashing has always gone down well over here.

PM: Well, if he understands the point I don't think he accepts the point that the High Court has made a seminal decision here. And what I've been trying to do with the states - all of them, including Western Australia - is to sit down and say let's get a

regime together here that works for the country, works for the whole nation. So the Aboriginal people feel they've got a stake in it but by the same token it doesn't gum up the works in terms of economic development. Now, the Bill is a good Bill. It's a fair and effective piece of draft law. And I asked him if he wanted an outline of the draft bill and he said yes - and I've undertaken to let him have that. And I certainly hope that when he goes through it he will see that the Commonwealth has done all it can reasonably do to make this a workable system of land management while at the same time trying to handle the very reasonable aspirations of Aboriginal people for justice.

J: What about these claims that he's been shut out of negotiations? He's been saying that for a couple of weeks.

PM: These are all matters of choice on Western Australia's part. I mean, obviously, the Commonwealth isn't going to shut anyone out of these negotiations. We'll talk to the Aboriginal community, we'll talk to the states. And I certainly welcome him in that. And I hope that he takes the position that the other Coalition premiers have taken. Now, I think he says, "Well they don't have our problem." But 'ours' is a national problem.

J: So you're still poles apart then, aren't you?

PM: Well, I don't know whether the Premier is poles apart with me as much as he is poles apart with the High Court. I think that's the problem.

J: So there's no way you can depend on Richard Court for any kind of national solution on this?

PM: Well, I didn't come here today expecting him to say, "Well, I'm giving your Bill a tick." But, I did expect a serious and proper conversation, you know, and that's what I've had with him. The public interest demands that heads of government get on with getting things worked out. And that's what we sought to do here today.

J: Can you understand why Western Australian Aboriginals would be very, very doubtful about having state based tribunals given the attitude of the state government towards the High Court decision?

PM: Well, this is a nation wide view of Aboriginal people against states generally. And that's why the Commonwealth, in its outline, has tried to cover off all those nice balances between Aboriginal interests - legitimate aspirations and interests of Aboriginal people - and the very clear interest the states have in land management. It's a nice, it seeks to reach a nice balance and I think we've largely achieved that.

J: Where do you stand on the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act?

PM: The Bill will be consistent with the Racial Discrimination Act

J: On another matter, Archbishop Tutu wants the Australian Government and industry to invest in South Africa. What's your reaction to that call.

PM: Well, I think that as South Africa resolves its economic difficulties - as it's clear that there is a stable political basis to the management of the country I don't think the calls will be necessary. I think you'll see investment flow from various parts of the world. The economic sanctions have been lifted now. That's the key point.

Ends.