



# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP  
INTERVIEW WITH LYNDAL CURTIS, ABC 'AM', MONDAY, 11 JULY 1994**

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**PM:** Well, I think, Mr Downer is trying to tell people that the royal family isn't our head of state or as he said yesterday, the Queen is irrelevant. I think these comments reveal Mr Downer as weak and vacillating. He wants two bob each way. He wants to say to the republicans look, don't worry, the Queen isn't our head of state and it doesn't matter and we won't need to shift to a republic. And, to the monarchists he says don't worry, we'll keep the monarchy, we'll hide it and pretend it isn't relevant.

**LC:** But, isn't he right in saying that the Queen's role is theoretical when in reality she doesn't exercise the say in this - the affairs of Australia?

**PM:** No, he is not right. The Queen is centrally involved in our Constitution and is our head of state. She is the Queen of Australia. I am quite sure the Queen would be very surprised to find that her Opposition leader in Australia believes that while she may be the monarch, she's not the Queen of Australia and she's not relevant. I mean, what these comments reveal is that notwithstanding the gravity of the issue itself, that is, the value of the monarchy and the prospects of a change to a republic it reveals so much about how Alexander Downer would handle major issues of national management - like hard decisions, like the shift outwards of Australia in the 1980s, the cuts in fiscal policy, the removal of tariffs, Mabo. I mean, what these reveal him as is, I think, first of all insincere, telling people the sun wouldn't rise, that is, the Queen isn't our head of state, weak, not wishing to offend one group or another and incapable of driving through hard decisions.

**LC:** Isn't he right in saying that the debate about the republic is not a debate about the royal family; it is a debate about the constitution and whether change is needed to that constitution?

- PM: It is a debate about whether the head of state of this country is an Australian person. And, the head of state of this country is not an Australian person and no wriggling around by Mr Downer is going to reveal that argument. I mean, it's unbelievable that an Opposition leader would try to defend the monarchy by saying it's irrelevant and to all intents and purposes doesn't exist. I mean, Dr Hewson looks like an absolute tower of strength compared to this fellow.
- LC: Why should the Liberal Party or anyone, in fact, have to come to a definitive view about the republic before they've seen what you have to offer?
- PM: Well, the Government is not asking them to come to a detailed view about a referendum proposal or anything of the like. It is saying that we expect people in public life to have definitive views about the key question of whether an Australian person should be head of state. Now, Mr Downer, has made it very clear. He said, at the start he made it clear, I am opposed, he said to the republic. He is in favour of the monarchy. Now, he is finding that he wants to try and curry favour within his own party and he's really saying 'oh, look, don't worry, don't worry, the monarchy is irrelevant.' And to the monarchists we can say we can just hide it and call it irrelevant. And to the republicans we can say 'well, look, the Queen really isn't our head of state at all.' I mean, I have never seen a weaker view put in the face of an issue. If we wants to stand with some strength and say 'I am opposed to the republic and I'm in favour of the monarchy'. Fine. We understand where his values are and what he stands for.
- LC: Hasn't one of his central points been that he supports the current system and hasn't found a need for a change. Isn't he right to wait and see what you have to offer before he decides on whether there is a need for a change?
- PM: Not right. I stood up at a policy speech in a national election and said I believe that an Australian person should be the Australian head of state and we should move to a republic. That is my position. If he wants to argue he can come to a decision about that matter without detail ... this argument that you've got to see what all the nuts and bolts are before you decide this key question. I mean, how can any person who has risen through public life to the leadership of a major party not know whether they actually believe that the Australian head of state should or should not be an Australian person. That's got nothing to do with the Government and it's got nothing to do with the Government's proposals.
- LC: Doesn't it though have to do with the detail of the proposals and the detail of how the system will be changed?
- PM: No, because you've got to first decide whether, in fact, you believe it is inappropriate for the mMonarch of Great Britain to be the head of state

of this country. Now, I believe it is. I don't believe we can have the full expression of Australian sovereignty, of Australian identity, of Australian aspirations while ever our head of state is borrowed from another country. Mr Downer does, but he doesn't have the courage to come out and say so and stick with it.

LC: When are you going to put forward your plan to the Australian people? Have you got a time frame?

PM: Well, I said at the election campaign that I, the Labor party believes there should be as its announced policy says, a republic by the centenary of our federation - 2001. I said upon winning the election, I would establish an expert group to write what in effect is, the first paper on the issues relating to a change which is to change our head of state and that we would publish that paper. That committee was established, the Liberals were invited to participate - they declined. Mr Turnbull headed it. It is a comprehensive document. It's been published and now the Cabinet sub-committee of the Government has had two meetings on that document. In other words we are doing exactly what we said, but we can't even find an Opposition leader who stands for anything. I mean, when Dr Hewson was in office he wouldn't commit himself to a republic and I'm happy to see now, he has second thoughts and Mr Downer was going to trounce the Labor Party all the way up to the next poll on this question of the monarchy and the republic and four weeks later where is he? Trying to tell the rest of us that the Queen isn't our head of state.

LC: Do you want to be around to put in place your republican plan?

PM: I want to be around to see that humbugs don't prosper. The thing about Alexander Downer is he is a policy free zone and perhaps worse than that he is a principle free zone. This country simply can't afford the luxury of somebody who simply wants the big white car and the Lodge and doesn't particularly care how he gets them.

LC: Prime Minister, thank you for your time.

PM: Thank you.

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