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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
ON ARRIVAL AT SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM
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J: Prime Minister, how do you think this forum will make a difference to the economic and environmental problems facing South Pacific nations?

PM: Well, I hope it does. I think, this is probably, in some cases, in some places in the Pacific one of the last opportunities we'll have to do something about forestry. I think we might be able to, we'll certainly be able to talk about fisheries resources, about development of human capital and tourism - things which are of material assistance to the community of the Pacific. So, the South Pacific Forum has been a useful forum in the past for discussing these issues. I hope, particularly with it in Australia on this, its 25th meeting, that we can do something useful again, for the welfare of the Pacific Island community.

J: But there's been a lot of talk in the past and not much has resulted, how can you actually improve things this time?

PM: Well, I wouldn't say that. I don't agree with that. I think we've made progress on particular issues. The theme of this is managing resources. This is the theme which has been generally promoted by Australia and accepted by the leaders of the Forum countries. And, I think, under the theme of managing resources - be it in fisheries, forestry, tourism, human development - this, I think, is an apposite and appropriate theme for now.

J: Why aren't you spending more time on Bougainville? Why has Bougainville got such a low profile?

PM: Because it is a matter for Papua New Guinea. It is not on the agenda any more than aboriginal reconciliation in Australia is on the agenda.

J: You've called for an urgent need for something to be done about the environment in the South Pacific. How do you think you're going to be able to convince the South Pacific that they should take some urgent action now?

- PM:** I've already had a number of bilateral discussions with leaders and prime ministers of some South Pacific countries about this subject. And, Australia has a lot to offer, I think, in terms of assistance we might be able to advance in terms of management of resources and that will be one of the things we'll be, certainly, suggesting.
- J:** Prime Minister, Pacific countries have criticised Australia for saying that the South Pacific has to pick up its socks, are you concerned about that kind of criticism?
- PM:** Well, I've never heard any serious criticism about that. I think that Australia has had to adjust itself in the last decade, of course it has, enormously. This is a totally different country than it was ten years ago. It is now an outward, competitive, confident place where before it wasn't. So, the adjustment task is one which Australia has worn and Australians have worn and succeeded in. And, it is a similar message, I think, for countries who we are giving substantial support to.
- J:** How willing are you to give them more aid, give them more of the means to combat the environmental degradation?
- PM:** Well, we already provide a lot of aid and I think it is a case of countries have got to, themselves, articulate a program to manage their resources on a sustainable basis.
- J:** How do you justify to the Australian taxpayer that we spend some thirty per cent of our foreign aid budget just on the fifteen nations of the forum given that, population-wise, they don't really amount to a very large number of people?
- PM:** Well, they are part of our responsibility, I think, as a developed country in this part of the world, in terms of aid and, particularly with Papua New Guinea, with the former trust arrangements which we had for most of this century. And, that's where that responsibility comes from and by and large we seek to administer it sensibly, creatively. Other developed countries, of course, have other priorities. Look at Africa, for instance. France, for instance, has a substantial foreign aid budget in the African region. We happen to live in the Asia-Pacific and it is in this area that most of our attention is turned.
- J:** You are asking for a fair bit from these countries. Do you think that they do have the resources to come up with the solutions without...?
- PM:** Well, I don't think it is asking countries much than to keep an eye on the sustainability of their own resources. I mean, to not make that point is to say, well, let resources get to the point where they are unsustainable and then where do they go then?

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