



## PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM RETREAT, KOORALBYN, QLD,  
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**PM:** Let me just say a couple of words about Alexander Downer over the weekend and his remarks about Mabo. I think the first thing it reveals is that the Liberal Party, again, has demonstrated that it is a party that has run out of puff, it's a party without ideas and without a philosophy. It hopes to govern Australia but it has no philosophy. It has no policy on Australia's identity and what Mr Downer has revealed over the weekend is that it doesn't have any policy of social cohesion, either. He said he would dismantle the Mabo legislation if, after an election victory, state premiers required him to do so. For a start, he is not his own person, secondly, Mabo is an historic piece of legislation based on an important piece of Australian law. That is, the decision by the High Court. What does Mr Downer think he is going to do? Overturn the High Court decision on Mabo? And, if not, how would he give certainty to title and give justice to Aboriginal people without it? It is amazing that the Liberal Party, in this day and age, is thinking of overturning Mabo at a time when other Liberal governments, of course, have extended land rights. And, it just shows, I think, that Alexander Downer is intent upon taking Australia back to the fifties. Alexander Downer is an old fashioned 1950s Liberal politician. The problem for Alexander Downer is that we are in 1994 and the world has moved on.

Could I say that, not only that, but at this South Pacific Forum a number of leaders have complemented Australia on the Mabo legislation, on the fact that we have recognised our indigenes and the essential requirement they have to reestablish their relationship with the land and take title to their land and, where they wish, renew a traditional lifestyle. And, to make these comments for simply, some passing applause at a Liberal party conference, displaying, again, that sort of essential, underlying bigotry about giving Aboriginal people land when the Pacific leaders are here will only, I think, sour their view about whether Australia has really seen the light in coming to terms with their indigenes. At any rate, it proves this point, Mr Downer is simply about regressive policies, taking Australia back to the 1950s. And, not only that, saying, not that we'll see their policies in the election but if after the election, after he has supposedly won, then it comes up his back to

change policy, he'll change it then. So, the public don't even know, going into an election, what his policies might be.

J: You've used the phrase, 'underlying bigotry', are you saying that Mr Downer is bigoted?

PM: I think what runs through the Western Australian Liberal party is unrestrained bigotry. And, to be pandering to that displays the worst instincts - let me say this, displays the Liberal Party at its worst. And, Mr Downer is always telling us about Malcolm Fraser, how he looks up to him; well, I'm quite sure Mr Fraser would not have a bar of these sorts of views.

J: Would it be possible to actually dismantle the Mabo legislation?

PM: Well, it's possible. What the parliament can do the parliament can undo. But by that stage, of course, there'll be decisions made under it, there is the whole consequent management of title that flows from it. All the High Court decision said was that there was a native title in the common law. It didn't say what sort of title, how it would be dispensed, how it would be heard, how claims would be adjudicated. All that was done by the legislation and you've got a number of Coalition states supporting it, NSW, Victoria and so where does it leave Mr Downer? It leaves him with the fanatics of the West Australian Liberal party.

J: Prime Minister, can I just ask you a question on the forum? How receptive have you found Island leaders to your message about sustainable development?

PM: Well, I thought the opening session was very encouraging. We had some, I think, very enlightened and enlightening speeches from various leaders about forestry and fisheries and human resource development which I am sure the consensus was we got away to a flying start and I think, today, that we'll improve upon it.

J: You think they'll come on board though, with your views?

PM: Well, I don't particularly have - I haven't got a particular set of proposals to put to them - it's about a view. And, we're already seeing, in a sense, firm support for that view in last night's expressions.

J: And how important is this retreat today, and what do you hope to achieve here today?

PM: Well, I think the retreat is important because it does give the leaders a chance to speak informally about matters which affect their economies and their societies. And, I think, building the forum around a theme has been very helpful in concentrating the debate.

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