



## **PRIME MINISTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
PARKROYAL HOTEL, BRISBANE  
TUESDAY 2 AUGUST, 1994**

**J:** You've made some pretty strong criticisms of Greenpeace, are there other factors involved?

**PM:** Well, I didn't want to extend the Forum press conference out here but I will take some domestic questions.

**J:** Are you concerned that Australia's willingness to train Indonesian troops will in any way undermine the American human rights push in that country?

**PM:** I don't think so. I think that the President has made his policy clear in respect of China. That is, that one has a bigger influence on countries when you are relevant to them and that is when the United States made a decision on MFN for China in the same way as Australia has a more relevant relationship with Indonesia than it's had in the past on all issues including human rights.

**J:** Mr Keating, John Fahey has announced a public consultation into the future of Circular Quay, today. You've got some strong personal views on that - what would you like to see done, and do you think a public consultation is the way to go about it?

**PM:** Well, it's no substitute for leadership, and I hope...the Premier has written to me saying that he wants to engage the Commonwealth again in a discussion about the financial costs of a change to Circular Quay, and we're quite happy to have the discussion. But we want a real one - and we want all the facts on the table.

**J:** So, you're prepared to put some money in?

**PM:** We are. But under certain conditions.

**J:** What's your reaction to Alexander Downer's letter involving the Citizens Initiated Referendum?

PM: Well, I thought there was a very revealing piece in today's Canberra Times where he admitted he had not told the truth six years ago when questioned about his attitude to the Citizens Initiated Referendum. Of course, this begs the question, when is he telling the truth? He will have to let us know. And he told a press conference, he told an ABC journalist recently, Paul Lyneham on the 7.30 Report, he said, "I'm the most open and honest person you'll ever find." Well, I mean generally, if any of us in public life - me, or John Hewson, or Bob Hawke, or Malcolm Fraser - came out and said, as Alexander Downer has said, "I am the most open and honest person you'll ever find", you'd get a horse laugh right through the country. He said this, and then has admitted that he has told an untruth on this question of Citizens Initiated Referenda... which means you can't tell when he is telling the truth. But, more than that, the notion of him being the most honest person around is actually debunked by himself, on his own admission.

Can I just say, though, that - about his defence yesterday in respect of Mabo where he says it's all about Aboriginal health - the Liberals always put this in these terms: you can have Aboriginal health, better health and better education, or land, but you can't have both. Where, in fact, it's about improved health and education and land. And, as any number of people wise about this subject will say, it's the alienation from the land which affects the welfare of aboriginal people. Now, this Government has vastly improved funding for aboriginal health and education, and of course last, obviously so, in the response to the Deaths In Custody Royal Commission. But, what he's about saying is you get one or the other. And really, what it's all about is essentially appealing to the redneck group in the West Australian Liberal party upon whom he has relied for support in his challenge.

So, it's not surprising that today the mining and farming leaders are concerned about Mr Downer's ill-considered remarks because repealing the Native Title Act, or even saying you will, creates great uncertainty as to tenure and as to title. Now, I know Richard Court's trying to do this with the High Court challenge. But they say no-one will know - the mining companies and the pastoralists say that no-one will now where they stand if the act is repealed. So, the tribunal is in operation - we're watching closely how it's working, and we think it's working effectively. So, this notion that it needs to be repealed - can I just say in seeking to help him, the Leader of the National party said today in a press statement that Alexander Downer said he would repeal the legislation, as an option, if it proved the Act was unworkable. But that's not what Alexander Downer said at all. What he said was, "If I have to repeal the Act to achieve our goals, then that's what I'll do." No mention of unworkable - that's only the spin being put on it by Tim Fischer as a Coalition partner. So, the fact is, here, the Liberals are up to their usual business - say to the Aboriginal community, 'We know better. We know what's best for you. It's better health and better education, but it's not land'. When the Aboriginal community say, "No,

no, no, what we need here is access to land", and what anybody in the debate about aboriginal policy knows, it's the alienation of aboriginal people from their land which produces most of the problems in their welfare. So, you know, the Liberals - the point I made yesterday, let me repeat the point - the Liberal Party has lost its way as a political party. It has no policy on Australia's identity, and even on things like social cohesion, going as they must to how we relate to our indigenes, they prove again - even after the Mabo debate has been had, and the Bill has been introduced and passed - they prove again that basically, they are about the policies of social division and can't give the lead as a political party which Australia now needs. The Liberal Party is not capable of giving a lead on these big issues of identity and culture and on social policy, and Alexander Downer has displayed that again in the last 24 hours.

**J:** Is Mr Downer himself a bigot do you think, Prime Minister?

**PM:** Well, I made it quite clear yesterday. I noticed a bit of sloppy reporting on this point. I said that he was giving support to, you know what I think is unrestrained bigotry on the part of the Western Australian Liberals. Now, I don't know quite in the end where Alexander Downer stands on this, but I hope that upon reflection, he'll recant from his views of giving succour and support to these unworthy rednecks.

**ends.**