

# **SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM**

**PRESS CONFERENCE BY FORUM SPOKESMAN  
THE HON P J KEATING, MP, PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA  
PARKROYAL HOTEL, BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND  
TUESDAY 2 AUGUST, 1994**

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**PM:** Well, I might say thank you indeed. I think that the Pacific leaders feel quite proud of the achievements of this Forum. The outcomes have justified our confidence in changing the format to bring the retreat to centre stage. Allowing leaders to discuss privately real issues of significance to their economies and societies has proven, I think, that the leaders are very much up to grappling with the big issues. And, I think on the theme of managing our resources, which was the theme of the Forum, they have shown that concrete actions go beyond words, and there have been plenty of those. On the big topics I mentioned to you yesterday, for instance, forestry, during the morning we held a separate meeting of Forum timber producing countries - that's Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu - and agreed to work towards a common code of conduct on forests, to which companies operating in those countries would have to adhere, and agreed to increase urgently the monitoring of logging. And, we've agreed that forestry officials will meet within two months to work on this, although we will be progressing the monitoring more quickly than that. This is in addition to that to which we agreed yesterday about common legislation et cetera, which we gave you notice of last night. On fisheries, of course, leaders have agreed on the merits of multi-lateral approaches in order to get fairer returns than at present. On airlines, leaders have agreed to examine options for rationalising airlines in order to reduce losses, which are a point which I advised you of yesterday. On tourism, leaders agreed on the need to protect fragile coastal zones. All of that was confirmed again today in the plenary session in the communique.

During this morning's meeting, we also agreed that South Pacific finance ministers would meet to discuss ways of dealing with common problems of public sector and fiscal mismanagement, where it might be a difficulty, and to put remedial changes into budgets, which all of us need to do from time to time. Finance ministers generally have the burden of being at the hard edge of all change in governments, particularly where the public sectors of governments are the predominate sectors and, we think, therefore, a meeting of finance ministers might be an appropriate thing to be doing, and where we

might be able to share each other's experiences and look at trend behaviour in fiscal policies. Other matters discussed and agreed during formal sessions are covered in the Forum communique, which of course, you have. Australia made two announcements, a South Pacific 2000 program, which will help South Pacific countries participate in the Sydney Olympic Games and benefit from them because the South Pacific gave very strong support to Australia in its Olympic campaign. And, also, additional support to South Pacific countries under the SPARTECA trade arrangements for export development and foreign investment promotion.

Overall, I think the meeting clearly shows the understanding that South Pacific leaders have, of the urgent challenges we face. And, the thing that impressed me, I must say, particularly, was the political will that they all showed in seeking to manage those challenges, and their willingness to actually grasp the nettle on big problems. I think the Forum has again proven its value as an institution. The drive for better management of our natural resources is something that each of the leaders feels strongly about, and I think the results of the Forum reflect a collective commitment to use our resources in a sustainable way. I think the Forum concluded with the leaders fairly pleased with themselves that - in a much more concentrated period of time, in two days, and with a theme for the Forum - that they have been able to maximise their time and the opportunity of their meeting together to grasp these larger problems, and we now have a year to consider those problems before the next Forum meeting in Papua New Guinea. Now, I'd be glad to take questions.

**J** Phillip Williams, ABC, one of the leaders I spoke to expressed concern about Australia's record on greenhouse gas emissions and called on Australia to make specific commitments to adhere to the convention and not to seek any exemptions from the individual conventions. Can you give those guarantees that will take place?

**PM** That argument has been put about by Greenpeace and Greenpeace wouldn't know a win if they tripped over it. Let me just tell you this - How many meetings of groups of countries like this are there, deciding to monitor forests, deciding that they will look at sustainable development in forests, particularly tropical hardwood forests, deciding to look at replenishment of stocks in fish and management of fish stocks, worry about sustainability of fishing fields, putting in place mechanisms to approach major countries who deal in them? At some point, organisations like Greenpeace, have got to say, well look, you go around the world, you talk about climate change, you talk about the big issues, and you don't get the response from industrial countries, and you don't get them from the resource rich countries. On this occasion you've got them, but you'd have to put it up in fluorescent lights with neon tubes to get the message through to Greenpeace. Now there is no doubt they will go around hawking their views to forum

island countries who are sitting six to nine feet, two or three metres above the surface of the sea, saying, well, and telling them erroneously that tomorrow they'll be doomed. And then saying Where does Australia stand? Well Australia stands very firmly on the question of greenhouse gas emissions. It has been part of the lead in the western world and industrial countries in doing this and again the communique supports this. But again, this has to be a global approach. All greenhouse gas emitters have to be treated in an equitable way and that's where we're going to make a difference but I think Greenpeace thinks that because the Australian Government has a proud environmental record and is keen about environmental issues that Greenpeace will ride Australia to alone - not in concert with industrial countries - to alone meet international greenhouse emissions without others being inclined to that. Well, they're wasting their time. Because what we need here is a global approach and, not a selective approach. But, more than that, isn't it about time that Greenpeace and these other environmental bodies actually know when they've kicked a goal? I mean they're all push and no pull. They're all push on all these communities but when they actually get a win on forest and they never know they've got one. They on their big amorphous subjects. So so much for Green peace. Thank you for the question.

**J** **Stewart Parker, AAP, the Marshall Islands** raised the issue again today of turning a couple of their islands into some sort of dump for nuclear waste. I think the President also suggested there may be some sort of compact among the Pacific Island countries on this issue. What's been the reaction of the Forum to the question.

**PM** I specifically asked the President whether he was seeking any endorsement by the Forum. He indicated no he wasn't. That he was simply telling the Forum advisedly that he'd set up a national commission to look at these issues. Now that is within the realm of his national sovereignty and of course it's the Marshall's prerogative to consider these issues but its another thing to seek support for them at the Forum. That he didn't do.

**J** **Paul Smith, Ten Network, Whilst some of the leaders have endorsed your concern over environmental matters, they've also raised the question of compensation and seem to be indicating that they'd be looking to Western countries, such as Australia, to help with compensation of environmental issues.**

**PM** Well it was never raised with me at any stage, not at any stage. That's not to say Australia won't help and do what it can, where it can. But, and as you know, I mean in respect of as the case in point, the Marovo Lagoon in the Western Solomons Australia has in fact agreed to write off the servicing of a certain amount of debt as a way of actually encouraging that to happen and in financially assisting albeit in a

modest way the Solomon Islands Government. But there hasn't been any general approach by Prime Ministers or Heads of Government to Australia about compensation.

**J** Chris Hammer, SBS Television. There's been quite some progress, as you mentioned, on fishing and forestries but not on some of the other issues outlined by Gordon Bilney earlier this year, namely population growth and land reform. As Australian Prime Minister, are you disappointed about that lack of progress?

**PM** I don't think you should see it as a lack of progress, I think everyone at these Forums understands that these are problem issues for some small island states but the conference had a theme to it and the theme was Managing Resources and in that theme, we've sought in the two day period of the conference to try and get some positive outcomes, and the ones we've got are very positive indeed and they'll require work over the course of the year. Now, it may be at the next... (inaudible)... that's not to say that some of these other issues are not being attended to by their national governments as time goes by, or it may be that at the next Forum or the one after it, if we agree to continue this, if you like, this focus on themes, that human resource development, education, population, et cetera may be a theme. But, for the moment, because there is an urgency about resource exploitation resources - an acute urgency - resource exploitation, and resource management was the theme, and it was of course naturally to that we devoted our attention.

**J** Michael (?) AFP, just to take you back to the Marshall Islands. Although the President didn't seek endorsement of the Forum, did you on behalf of Australia or did any of the Pacific leaders actively express opposition to what he was proposing to you?

**PM** No because he was very politely advising the Forum of the fact that he thought, given the fact that certain parts of the Marshall Islands had been rendered by former nuclear testing as being uninhabitable, that there may be a purpose and given the geological stability of the area, in this study being undertaken. Well, these are views, that's all they are. These are views, but they are more than views from him, they are advice that he set up a National Commission. This was not a debate about the merits of this issue. It was a contribution to the preliminary session, but I did ask the President to be clear at the end, was he seeking any endorsement by the Forum and he said no.

**J** Victor Larear from Mexico. Four countries from America and three countries from South Pacific are members of APEC. Is there any prospects of linking APEC with any organisation like the Forum for example?

- PM** Well, Papua New Guinea is a member of APEC as from the next meeting and of course Australia and New Zealand are members of APEC. So there is a fairly strong, if you like, some very clear relationships there, between countries with South Pacific interests and APEC so I've got no doubt that in any APEC context, anything which has a particularly South Pacific focus and needs to be put, there are enough of us there to be able to put any view we think is relevant to the South Pacific.
- J** Craig Skehan, AAP, Mr Keating, The Solomon Islands said they object to a separate dialogue meeting with Taiwan being held down on the Gold Coast rather than here in Brisbane, Is that a case of pandering to the sensitivities of the PRC, and should organisations like the Forum allow differences between countries like Taiwan and the PRC to interfere in normal discussions in AID programs and so on.
- PM** Well, we're the host of this meeting, and I think unusually as host we are the first among a few who actually recognise the Government of China as the Government of China, all China, and therefore, it becomes germane to any invitation we might be associated with, if not issue, for Taiwan to come here. As you know, the PRC wanted any dialogue with Taiwan to take place in countries which recognise Taiwan and outside of Australia. Now, as it turns out, we're having the dialogue on the Gold Coast tomorrow, I think it is, and China will be attending, that's the PRC will be attending the dialogue partners meetings and will be attending tonight, the dinner which I am hosting for dialogue partners and Pacific leaders, so I think honour is being settled all the way around. I mean, China wanted the meeting outside Australia, it isn't, they're still coming, Taiwan wanted it here, it's not getting its way, it's down at the Gold Coast, and I think that's a reasonable compromise of interest and a reasonable outcome for people who wanted benefit to from the dialogue.
- J** John Uri, Sydney Pacific News. Earlier on, Prime Minister, I raised the question with Prime Minister Francis Hilly and the question was that there is an agreement to provide 2 million dollars to the Solomon Islands and he stipulated that there is a condition to that offer. Can you stipulate what that condition is and also can you tell me whether the Government was actually happy about that if there was any condition attached to that offer.
- PM** No, I spoke to the Prime Minister some months ago saying that I was concerned that one of the prospects for long term tourism in the Solomons, that's the Marovo Lagoon area, may be deposited in some way by forest practices and logging and that he said that this was a concern of his and his Government's and the matter was essentially left in his hands. What I said was that he also, at the same meeting, approached me about some outstanding loans to Australia, and I said if he incurred costs in dealing with logging in the Marovo Lagoon area

we might meet him part of the way by carrying some of these charges ourselves. Now, I said that to him. There's been a debate in the Solomons about this issue and the Prime Minister at his own behest made an announcement yesterday saying there'd be a termination of all logging in that area and then went on to make a further announcement which you now have details of. Let me just say I congratulate him for it, I think it shows a lot of leadership and this is the kind of Government I think the Pacific needs and particularly a country like the Solomons who now find themselves faced with unscrupulous practices in logging.

**J:** Mariko Horokawa from Yomiuri Shimbun, Japanese Newspaper. Regarding the fisheries issues, I've heard that, not from the Japanese side, but the countries that have bilateral agreements with Japan on fishing at the moment are quite happy with what they have, so, how soon do you think that they would get into multilateral agreements, and have you set any timetables?

**PM:** No, just that there is a general view that multilateral management of this fishery area will produce better results for the countries concerned and for, those who buy the product. Because, we won't reach a point where we have over exploitation of certain fisheries, and a long term decline of fish stocks, which, for instance we've seen with the southern blue fin tuna, which is a very popular, large, species of tuna in Japan. It's now not as plentiful as it used to be, and countries which consume a large level of fish in their diet, and Japan is one, is, I think will be well served by an approach which says, let's make sure that we are thinking about the habits of these migratory fish. What are the influences on them? How might we protect them? How do we guarantee the stocks exist? And, the other thing, how do we get a decent price for the product? Now, it's all of that, I think, which has encouraged people to take the view. Now, some bilateral agreements may suit individual countries, others may not. As a rule, they don't, because, their proceeds are very greatly diminished compared to some other bilateral arrangements. Understandably they want to improve these.

**J:** La Monde from New Caledonia. The Kanak people from New Caledonia have expressed, since a few years, that they want to become observers at the Forum. Has this been considered at any stage? And, the second thing, what do you think of the right wing not answering the invitation at the Forum since they have been invited a few years ago?

**PM:** Well, look can I just say, it was not discussed at the Forum although of course we, the FLNKS come as unofficial observers to the Forum, and have on this occasion. I mean that's fine, that relationship, I think is working well, and this all depends in the long run on domestic outcomes in New Caledonia. I think the Forum in a sense is, we are

an interlocutor, we're not deciding, we're not playing a vital role, and can't play a key role, in their political future.

**J:** Thank you Mr Keating, my name is Benito Falu from so much for Greenpeace organisation. Just one question, are you going to honour your commitment? Yes or no?

**PM:** I gave you an answer before, and that is that Greenpeace ought to wake up to itself and work out where there's some value in the world and not realise when it's actually got a win - like it has over the weekend - it just puts that straight in its pocket and goes on to the next amorphous issue. Now, I think the Australian government has an environment record, second to none in the western world. And, it doesn't need to be kept up to the mark by Greenpeace. Nor are we encouraged by the fact that a lot of the moderates have been largely expunged from Greenpeace recently, which I don't think bodes well for Greenpeace's influences on governments like Australia.

**J:** Mr Keating, are you concerned at Australia's willingness to train Indonesian troops is in any way undermining ...

**PM:** Well, I think we'll, I crossed the border yesterday, but I don't think I should today.

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