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# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
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## **E&OE PROOF COPY**

**J:** What brings you to Perth, Prime Minister?

**PM:** What brings an Australian Prime Minister anywhere in Australia? The responsibilities of the Prime Ministership, of course.

**J:** You have been under a bit of stick though for not coming here often enough.

**PM:** I was coming in August as you know, I got a bout of the flu, but from the east it's basically two days and I come here as often as I go to South Australia or Tasmania.

**J:** Are there any plans yet to meet Premier Court?

**PM:** I don't think he is serious about all of that is he?

**J:** He's been a bit miffed

**PM:** I'm sure he is.

**J:** But, you didn't tell him you were coming?

**PM:** He knew, in fact we invited him to the launching of the REDO - the Regional Economic Development Organisation - so he must have known I was coming because Hendy Cowan was coming and he sent his apologies, but Hendy is a nice fellow, he did the show. So, he did know I was coming weeks ago.

**J:** Do you take the polls seriously, the polls that show you are so unpopular in Western Australia?

PM: Well, part of that is the sort of within Parliament ethos of governments and they are always ... polls are up and polls are down, there is only one poll that matters - the big one.

J: But the fact that you are touring the marginal electorates obviously highlights that doesn't it?

PM: Well, I, probably hope it should.

J: Do you accept that your popularity is different here than it is in the east?

PM: Well, it could be but, you know, we did reasonably well in West Australia in the last one. Now look, let me make this point. In this Government I have been the Treasurer and the Prime Minister, most of the things that I have been associated with have been in favour of the primary exporting states. The big claim of Western Australia for 20 years was to take the tariff monkey off West Australia's back and I was one of the principal people involved in that. I gave a statistic which I thought was pretty compelling at the last function today saying Australia's competitiveness is 40 per cent improved since John Howard was the Treasurer. That is why the ship building is working, that is why we have just saw a specialised steel facility in the aircraft industry - Western Aerospace - working, it is because of competitiveness. That comes by the exchange rate, inflation, wages and productivity. That is why Western Australia is growing faster than or as fast as any other State, faster than most in Australia because of the policies of the Federal Government. And so, that being the case and where we have had tremendous employment growth, why wouldn't the Federal Government be doing well in Western Australia? Why shouldn't it be doing well? I mean, if our policies are principally responsible - and they are - for Western Australia's economic strength, why shouldn't we be doing well?

J: Do you think West Australian's understand that?

PM: Well, maybe not everybody does understand it as well, but let me assure them that the things that matter - the exchange rate, interest rates, inflation, wages, all of that structure which underpins this growth economy - comes from the Federal Government policies. I mean, you know we have got new industries developing, the one I was at this afternoon making alloys for aircraft engines. Could you imagine that 10 years ago? Really, it is there because of the Federal Government policies. So, I think that people are starting to understand that a sophisticated manufacturing, a sophisticated service sector, greater strength of traditional industries like mining and agriculture come from the Federal Government policies.

- J: But, Do you understand the struggle you've got knowing that you have got a Premier in WA who is belting you across the head at every opportunity?
- PM: Well, I mean, people put a bit of discount through all that stuff. The public are very smart.
- J: He put up petrol 4 cents a couple of weeks ago and basically blamed the Federal Government.
- PM: Well, if you are silly enough to believe that you will believe anything won't you?
- J: Well, I'm not.
- PM: Well you're not? Well, that's good. I mean you are answering your own questions.
- J: The West had a poll (The West Australian newspaper) saying that ... per cent of the public thought that the Federal Government, not the State Government put up petrol.
- PM: Richard Court put the petrol prices up for no other reason than he wanted the money for his revenue. Nothing to do with the Commonwealth and the story that in some way we have diminished Commonwealth road payments is completely untrue. The underlying payments have been growing.
- J: The Western Australian Premiers have bashed Prime Ministers forever, but he seems to have made an art form out of it. Has it affected ... (inaudible) ...
- PM: Well, I don't know, he hasn't quite got it perfected, I know his father, the old story about lightning not striking the same place twice, Charlie used to say "**Western Australia**", he hasn't got that part of it right yet. I mean, he has got the rest of the bits, you know, it is all Canberra and they are fighting the centralists, but he needs to go around to Charlie for some lessons in "**Western Australia**", because Charlie used to get that whoosh to the word.
- J: The Head of the Native Title Tribunal has said that there are moral shortcomings in the principles by which native title is recognised ... in a ruling yesterday.
- PM: I haven't seen the ruling, but what the High Court said that Aboriginal custom and tradition was a source of Australian common law. What the Commonwealth has fleshed out is a major piece of property and cultural law in the Native Title Act. It will take a while for teething problems to see it into place. The place it's not in place is Western Australia because the Western Australian government is wilfully going

against the rest of the nation. Richard Court's government is doing what the government of Queensland isn't doing, the government of New South Wales isn't doing, the government of Victoria isn't doing, the government of Tasmania isn't doing, the government of South Australia and the Commonwealth. That is, trying to go it alone in a very unfair policy and one which I think is going to be very disruptive for business in Western Australia.

J: Do you have any plans at all to alter your native title legislation?

PM: No, but we have said that in terms of any review we might have down the track coming from some of the case law, we would look at it but not to its principle.

J: Would the cuts be as savage as Mr Howard is trying to make out?

PM: Well, Mr Howard doesn't believe in, all the variables in economic management - interest rates, revenue and cutting spending - he doesn't believe in any of those things he said, there should be no increase in interest rates, there should be no change in revenue and we shouldn't cut spending. This is the same fellow that wants to be taken seriously as somebody who can put a national budget together. Now, Mr Howard is a lucky fellow, he has been given a second go. You see Andrew (Peacock) got a second go, he wanted a second go. Now, he has got the second go, but you think he would stick to a few principles and one of the principles should be what is best for the nations budget is best for the nation, obviously, and that he should help rather than hinder the processes of budget preparation.

J: Prime Minister ...(inaudible) ...

PM: I'm quite sure, I said yesterday, that when the Government presents its budget a lot of people in the Liberal party who have supposedly this list will say oh, we wimped out: "the Labor government has wimped out because we haven't taken the savage options". So, this week we are taking the savage options, when the budget comes out they'll say 'ah ha, you never took the savage options'.

J: Which one are you going to choose?

PM: Well, wait and see.

J: Prime Minister, what do you say to the people in West Australia who are deeply concerned about what is happening to our forests in the South West?

PM: What I want is, I think, what most Australians want and that is the most important pristine stands of trees to be saved for our heritage and our posterity, yet at the same time, the capacity to have a sustainable timber industry and getting that balance right is what it is all about.

That balance will not be struck properly when you have got Wilderness Society people at one side saying every group of trees are pristine when it is not true or the timber industry people on the other side getting the chain saw out too. There is a policy down the middle and the only party at this stage following the middle course which will look after both those imperatives is the Federal government.

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