



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH RAY MARTIN, A CURRENT AFFAIR, CHANNEL NINE
27 FEBRUARY 1995**

E&OE PROOF COPY

RM: Would you agree that we have wasted, let's say, \$232 million in the last five years as has been alleged?

PM: Well, if statistics are the measure, the answer to that is yes, but we have quite dramatically improved the mortality rates of children.

RM: There was a baby die of dysentery just up the track here a week ago. It didn't even make the papers. There was a baby die of meningitis two weeks ago, didn't make the papers. It is just taken for granted, who cares?

PM: Well, I think, we care. You care and I care for a start. I think lots of Australians care.

RM: Certainly Aborigines have to care, that is why they flew in from the bush. More planes than this little dirt strip has ever handled. And, they stood waiting in the rain for the big fella, like a water colour. Mr Keating is clearly more relaxed small talking to kids and soaking up a bit of culture. Despite 12 years of Labor doing next to nothing for Aboriginal health, everybody was polite and very grateful.

GRAB: Thank you for coming here. We are all happy to see you here and happy to have you here.

PM: Thank you indeed.

RM: They say there is only one bloke who can change this and that is you.

PM: Well, I thank them for their faith in me. I will do my best.

RM: Are you conscious of that responsibility, because they have had politicians promise all kinds of things ... tell them they have got to get healthy.

RM: This is why land, I think, we know the history of Mabo, we are now introducing the Land Fund Bill to let Aboriginal people buy back land. I think land gives them empowerment, the opportunity of a traditional lifestyle and whenever they have a traditional lifestyle the diabetes drops, the state of their mind improves, the diet improves, the health improves. But, I think we have then got to move on these issues on environmental health like for instance, the state of the sewerage systems, the state of their general water supplies, most of them live on bore water, they don't actually have town water. They don't have storages, they don't have dams.

RM: But this is hundreds of millions of dollars - are you prepared to commit that?

PM: Well, I think we are prepared to commit that which can be spent in a strategy which is co-ordinated and sensible. That is, one that works.

RM: But let's just say that I'm a father of two children, and I live in one of these outback towns in Australia, and I see my mother has gone blind, and my father is about to go blind, and I have got diabetes, and the kids have got dysentery, and you're talking about "hopefully the States will do something for us".

PM: No, I'm ...

RM: We're going to be dead before the State's do something for us.

PM: No. I'm not saying that we sit back and let the States do it - I'm saying that we all have to join in on the problem. I mean...

RM: But isn't it time for a shake-up? I thought that's what you had been saying, that the time has come now to change the way we do it?

↓

PM: I think that's right - I think we do have to change the way we do it. What is the catalyst for the change? The involvement of the community themselves. I think their willingness to be in it means that there is some basis for the rest of us taking a different look, and a new approach to it.

RM: But you know State Governments - they're going to look where the votes are? They will look up into Cape York and they will say "not too many votes up there - a bunch of Aboriginal people. Right then, let's put the \$100 million down into Brisbane, or lets put it in Sydney, or lets put it somewhere else".

- PM: There is a sub-division which is out of a provincial town - a suburb of a provincial town, somebody puts in a 10 acre sub-division - there will be a water line out there in double-jig time. There will be the sewerage line out there, there will be the road - the works. If it is an Aboriginal community, which has been in the same location for 50 years, there's nothing.
- RM: So, what are you going to do?
- PM: You have either got to encourage them to do it, pay them to do it, shame them into doing it - a combination of all these things.
- RM: The political experts will tell me that there are no votes in Aborigines in Australia, so I presume that you are not doing it for votes?
- PM: It's done because it should be done.
- RM: Because you're committed to it?
- PM: Because it's a stain on our community to have this, that's why.
- RM: I could sit here and say "well, you have been in Government for 12 years - you have been Prime Minister for a couple of years - how long do you want? Twelve years not enough? Do you want 20 years?"
- PM: That criticism is valid, except I think you have got to see ... we have got to get back to this thing about the division of responsibilities in the Federation - to try and get that division better.
- RM: Is there more money for the Aborigines in the Budget?
- PM: That will depend on whether we think we can spend it wisely, quickly, and how we can wind programs up.
- RM: So, maybe?
- PM: Maybe. Probably.

ends.