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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH DAMIEN MURPHY, 2WEB, BOURKE
5 APRIL 1995**

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DM: Mr Keating, good morning and welcome to Bourke.

PM: Good on you, Damien. Nice to be here - great to be here in the name of Fred Hollows.

DM: Ever been to Bourke before?

PM: No. I have been, of course, all over - being a New South Welshman - I have been all over NSW, but I have always wanted to come to Bourke.

DM: A number of people have said over the last couple of days that really with Fred Hollows the recognition hasn't come until his death - it has really sort of been since Fred Hollows died that, you know, all the news about the good work that he did has come about. Now, you actually met Fred Hollows - what are your memories of the late Professor?

PM: I don't think Fred was after recognition - he was after results. And I think that's why people admired him, and what I remember of him was a very no-nonsense, straight to the point fellow who was a member of the community. Though he was a professional, he dedicated himself to people and he was a no-nonsense, down to earth, straight down to the job sort of person.

DM: You have come a long way - you have come up from Canberra last night - why have you made the effort to be here today for the launch of the Fred Hollows race?

PM: I think that it is important that people who do good things - like Fred did, and where it is now being continued by the Hollows Foundation with Gabi and Mike Lynskey and others that this sort of community

activity should be celebrated and supported, because it is going on not simply in Australia - with disadvantaged communities like the Aboriginal community - but it is going on now in Nepal and Eritrea and Vietnam and all these other places where hundreds and thousands of people are going to be given back their sight. It is also a model for the way we can approach the problem of health - well, certainly health problems of disadvantaged people - direct, on the ground, compassionate, practical. So these are the reasons we are here - to remember Fred and to support the Foundation.

DM: Professor Hollows was heavily involved in health care for indigenous Australians, as you just mentioned, and made it his priority to care for those free of charge who could afford nothing else - are these the sorts of values that are maintained by the Federal Government today?

PM: That's why we say the values - one of the primary things that drives Government policies is inclusion. That everybody...this is where Medicare comes from - you get medical support regardless of income, and regardless of your circumstances - but we want to make sure that this universality of care and compassion goes to the most disadvantaged. So that's why we are interested in the Aboriginal community, that's why we are interested in the long-term unemployed, it's why we try and say that this country - the policies are there for everybody. It is one nation, and it is inclusive. And I think Fred made that very obvious he was doing - he could have been a professional in a ritzy house with a Mercedes under his..., instead of that he was out in the scrub looking after disadvantaged people. I think that same spirit should pervade Government policy, and I can say that with this Government, it does.

DM: Fred is buried at Bourke, of course - that was his request - it's a harsh environment out here - we have had the drought for the last 18 months or so, and we did get some rain back in January. However, that rain hasn't continued - the drought is still a bit of a problem up here - any chance of a review of financial assistance policies for farmers?

PM: Let me tell you the Mayor said the moon looked pretty good last night, and he thinks that the rain is coming - there was half an inch overnight, so - was it half an inch, Wally? (*"further out"*) Further out. Well anyway I'm banking on him - I think he is the best weather man I know around here. And it's rain, of course, that matters in the farm analysis, but what we have sought to do is to extend the Commonwealth's social security system to farmers who have been severely affected by drought, by removing the on-farm assets tests. Now, what that means is that we discount the value of the assets to give people income support. And I think we have now got about 10,000 families - farm families - getting income support, where they weren't before. Because the argument used to be you have got all these assets, but as we know, those assets can't be eaten, and you can't dispose of them, so then we have got - of course - the structural adjustment assistance

through RAS - the Rural Adjustment Scheme. And we have been continuing to improve that over time. At any rate, I am going to meet some of the people here today who have been affected by drought - just have a discussion with them.

DM: Just yesterday, newly elected State Premier Bob Carr announced that he would be touring the State tomorrow and Friday - if he determines that there is more assistance required, will you be heeding that?

PM: We have a set of what we call national disaster relief arrangements, and we have got an even more sophisticated set of arrangements now with the drought because there has been this sort of impact on the seasons that seems to have changed, and we have had more drought than perhaps we have seen in a long time, and policy has adjusted accordingly. So we have got a regime running with the States - particularly Queensland and NSW. But NSW was dragging the chain on drought payments, and I hope Bob Carr does put the right amount of time and attention to it.

DM: Liberal Senator from Western Australia, Noel Crichton-Browne, with the domestic violence restraint order there - should he stay, or should he go?

PM: That's something for himself and the Liberal Party.

DM: If there was somebody in the Labor Party who was involved in the same sort of scandal if you like, what would you be suggesting they do?

PM: These are basically personal matters, and they are for Parties to make decisions about who they have representing them. I don't want to be judgmental about Mr Crichton-Browne and the Liberal Party - he has got his own family and his own party to think about, and I'm afraid it is a matter for them.

DM: Top story of the day this morning is the super-league - what do you think about that?

PM: I think it has added a lot of spice to football, obviously. It's the biggest news since World Series Cricket.

DM: Do you think there is any role for the Government in the super-league?

PM: A good role as a spectator, I can tell you that.

DM: Any deeper role than that - Government intervention?

PM: I don't think so.

DM: Okay. You wouldn't be worried then if the Rugby League split and there were two competitions running concurrently?

PM: As long as league fans think there is a live, energetic competition out there...when Rugby League moved to other States there was bound to be some sort of change in the League, I think. But anyway, that is for them to manage.

DM: You're a Canterbury supporter - how would you feel if the team is knocked out of the League next Tuesday?

PM: It depends whether the Sydney clubs - which are now getting where you can run a competition with the Bronco's and the Raiders with the Sydney clubs the way they were - I think probably what has happened might have been inevitable, maybe it happened a bit faster with a couple of big cheque books around.

DM: Prime Minister, super league or no super league, thanks very much for your time today, and I hope you have a great day in Bourke.

PM: Good on you - thanks Damien, good to be here.

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