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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
INTERVIEW WITH ANDY COPERMAN, RADIO 4RK, ROCKHAMPTON,
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AC: Mr Keating, good afternoon.

PM: How are you Andy?

AC: Very well. I guess because Waltzing Matilda is on everyone's lips, you have just come from the Waltzing Matilda Centenary celebrations at Winton yesterday, what was the feeling like there?

PM: There was, no doubt, all the feeling you would want to expect with a centenary celebration and I said last night, this really is our national song, it is not our national anthem but it is our national song. And whenever you hear it sung particularly in a crowd, I was in Ireland about 18 months ago at a place called Croke Park which is where they hold the all Ireland football grand final, Gaelic football final, and there was probably about 120,000 people there and they had six bands, at any rate I was a sort of guest of the Irish Prime Minister and after I had spoken and he had spoken the band struck up Waltzing Matilda and the whole of the stadium sang it through all the verses, the five I think, verses.

AC: I can't remember how many myself.

PM: Yeah, but they know all the verses and if you are an Australian, you are sitting there and there are 100,000 people up singing a tune it makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck I can tell you.

AC: Well I must ask this question, were you given a bit of a surprise when Ted Egan shoved the microphone in your direction yesterday afternoon or not. Because the grab that was played on the news this morning perhaps wasn't all that flattering. Was that a bit....

PM: I didn't know what the grab was, what did it say?

- AC: There has been suggestions going around that you don't know the words to Waltzing Matilda.
- PM: Oh, he said let's sing the first verse. But it was a matter of, he had such a big booming voice and he had the microphone and we let him sing it, that was all.
- AC: Yes, I think that is the case with Ted Egan. Well a celebration like this with a song like Waltzing Matilda raises the issue of whether we got it wrong at the referendum about the National Anthem, do you think that perhaps we should put that vote to the people once again or not?
- PM: Oh no, you can't be solemn about someone putting a Jumbuk in a bag can you, I mean, you know a jolly Jumbuk, jolly swagman he wasn't too jolly when he jumped in the river so I mean, in a funny kind of way the song has picked up a lot of national sentiment but it is not a solemn song, it is not the Anthem and the Anthem is fine as far as I'm concerned.
- AC: Although you could look at it as if it is an unemployed person who steals some food and then commits suicide to avoid being captured by the police, I mean that is one way of looking at it isn't it?
- PM: Or, it could be a defiant person, a sort of liberating message and sort of egalitarian message. The thing is, I don't think the song needs to be dissected and say what does this really mean, what did Paterson mean when he wrote this line, but rather it is the emotional impact of the thing. It is a song that I'm sure most Australians have felt emotional about at some point or another.
- AC: I'm sure we agree with you there. Before we go to some calls a topic which has been raised here today and, perhaps, you might be interested in giving us some comments and an issue perhaps that is more dear to the hearts of us is the super league football competition. What is your feeling on that?
- PM: Well it is a matter for the league, that is my feeling about it. What is driving this is one television medium competing with another. I mean, it is a medium change issue. That is, free to air television has been the medium in Australian television and the medium that is coming via fibre optic cables and satellite is pay television. And the other thing about pay television, of course, is it is traded internationally, products traded internationally. So obviously News Limited which runs an international pay television business is wanting product for its system and for Australia and the free to air stations, in this case Channel 9, is seeking to protect the franchise it has over the existing rugby league. Now entering into that also the dynamic of the fact that you have got the Broncos and the Raiders and these other out of Sydney clubs has changed the nature of the competition, seen more stars develop and, I mean, what's happened now is the catalyst of the television change is producing change which picks up the shift to the big regional and city state clubs.

- AC: Michael Lee has given a commitment that the existing major sports will always be shown on free to air television. If the Super League does take over from the ARL as the major rugby league competition in Australia, and that is only to be shown on pay-television, won't that throw that commitment to ...
- PM: I don't think so, because I think Mr Cowley said on behalf of News Limited they had no intention of flouting the syphoning rules and this is basically not a matter for the Government this is a matter for the league. As far as we are concerned, we've said that we have this thing called anti-syphoning which means, taking the code out of it, really means that somebody can see the rugby league, in this case the Winfield Cup, on free-to-air television and it isn't taken and syphoned onto pay-television. So we have what's called anti-syphoning rules. Now they will cover all of the major things but they won't cover every contingency of course. And the other thing about the existing television of football is that, you know, on a Sunday night you might see 40 minutes of the game of the day. You don't see all the other matches. But, of course, with pay-television you will be able to see nearly all the matches.
- AC: I'll just repeat that, if the Super League does take over, enforces the end of the ARL, will that mean that people will have to pay to watch any rugby league coverage?
- PM: Well News Limited, which is now the one promoting the Super League, say that they won't be doing anything which is contrary to the syphoning rules so I don't think it will arise.
- AC: All right, well on that note we might go to our first caller which I guess will be back to Waltzing Matilda, this is Richard.
- C: Good afternoon and good afternoon Mr Keating.
- PM: How are you Richard?
- C: Mr Keating, I've just released this week my fourth history of Waltzing Matilda - Waltzing Matilda Ballad of the Fair Go - And in that book I quote what Banjo Paterson wrote about the song and I'd like to read to you and ask your opinion on Banjo Paterson's account. He refers to the origins and history tells us quite definitely that he wrote the song in January 1895 and that was just 14 weeks after the burning of Dagworth woolshed and the death of Samuel Hothmeister. Now I will read what Banjo Paterson says, it comes from a story called Golden Water from a radio broadcast in the 1930s.
- AC: Could I interrupt you here and ask you to be quite brief please Richard we do have a lot of people coming afterwards?
- C: Okay, well this is what Banjo says. He says that the striking shearers burnt down MacPherson's woolshed and a man was picked up dead,

this engendered no malice and I've seen MacPhersons handing out champagne through a pub window to these very shearers and here a personal reminiscence may be worth recording while resting for lunch or while changing horses on our for and hand journey Ms MacPherson used to play a little Scottish tune on the zither, I put words to it and called it Waltzing Matilda. I'd just like Mr Keating's comment on that, what Banjo said.

PM: Well I think he has obviously got a catchy tune regardless of its Scottish antecedence and he's obviously had some impression or some impact on him on this person who supposedly put the Jumbuk in the bag and been chased by the police and written this thing. It is not clear what he meant to say other than the words, that is what the meaning behind the words was, but as I said a bit earlier in the program I don't think the song is to be dissected or psychologically analysed. I mean the thing is in its melody and in its words and it is very much, I mean you see the British sing land of hope and glory and the Americans sing God bless America, I mean, this is the Australian equivalent. And I think it is the emotionalism of the song it is now the main message, and I said last night, the ghost of the swagman's ghost - I think the ghost is the song, it's still around. That is, the song is still around so the ghost is still around.

C: Do you think it's the ballad of the fair go, Mr Keating.

PM: I think it has got these egalitarian tones through it. And I think I agree with you about that. Yes I do.

AC: To move on to the next caller if you don't mind. This is Len.

C: Good afternoon.

PM: Len, how are you.

C: Not too bad, yourself?

PM: I'm good thanks.

C: I've just got a quick question in respect to reconciliation and I'm just wondering why it is not possible for the Aboriginal community to induct or initiate all Australians into their tribes and cause a one united new nation to be formed in Australia. I mean it is our practice in Australia to do this we call it naturalisation, but the Aboriginal community tell me that that is impossible to do, I was just wondering if Mr Keating could tell me why?

PM: I don't know why. I mean, it is like a pole trying to induct you and say that you are Polish or a Scotsman trying to induct me and say that I'm a Scot, I mean I'm not. I suppose that is the reason. Beyond that I don't think the argument follows that therefore we can't be one nation. I think that the multiculturalism of this country, I mean we have accepted here people from all over the world living here in great

harmony and to accept them but not accept the first Australians would be a real damnation of the whole spirit of cooperation, of assimilation that we are now so proud of and I think the whole notion of racism towards Aboriginal people has declined recently I think that things like Mabo have made Australians feel better about the fact that we have come to terms with these terrible wrongs and that they are being put right, if late, and that sense has given the reconciliation council and the whole process of reconciliation some real wind behind it.

C: What I'm saying is that we as Australians like you say, we accept people from all over the world into here and we have accepted the first nation people as far as we're concerned. But it seems to be that they have initiated white Australians into tribes before it is a practice. But to put it up and say well look we've taken this step, why not a step from your direction which is a practice of your culture and initiate us all into the Aboriginal community, all under the one flag?

PM: I don't think you should try and assume or paint the argument that they, the victims, in some way are now doing the wrong. They are the people who have been wronged. They, very clearly have been the victims. And if there is magnanimity it is to flow from us to them and not the other way around. Not that they haven't participated in this country in its sports, in its civic life, in its defence, all the things that we have required of ourselves, we have required of them and they have done. I don't think one can take the view and say because some Aboriginal tribe isn't initiating the whole Australian nation there is something wrong with them. The fact that they may have given entry and initiation to some non-Aboriginal people is a tribute to those people I guess.

AC: I'm afraid we have to move on from you Len, thanks very much for your call this afternoon ... to the Sunshine coast now and Judy joins us. Good afternoon Judy.

C: Good afternoon.

PM: Judy how are you doing?

C: I'm well thanks. How are you doing?

PM: Good.

C: First of all just on the subject Waltzing Matilda I think you really hit it on the head there when you said people are trying to dissect it far too much. It really is a song, its a great song and I think people should just accept it for that.

PM: That's right. For its emotional value.

C: What my question was actually about Mr Keating, was with work that I'm involved in I come across the question a lot from my clients about the current negative gearing laws and I'm being continually asked if the

Government is going to change that and I would just like to know if the Labor Government has any plans to change it?

PM: We did change it in the 1980s, but we changed it back and the reason we did was because ... that is negative gearing is where people write off against other income the costs of holding some asset like property, a rental property, and they deduct the costs against their other income. When we turned our back against it in the mid 1980s it was because the people who were doing it never intended to pay any tax. That is, when the rent and say the interest became the same, they would then sell the property so at no stage did the Tax Commissioner or the Commonwealth ever get ... we recognised the cost, but the Commonwealth never got a benefit. But when the capital gains tax was introduced it meant then that once they sold the property ...

C: That's when they pay their tax.

PM: ... they paid their tax then. So, there was some symmetry in the negative gearing on the one side and capital gains on the other. And that is why it has stayed the way it has ever since.

C: And there is certainly no plans to change that?

PM: Well, there has been none on our part.

C: All right, thanks for your time.

AC: To Jeff in Harvey Bay.

C: Hello.

PM: How are you Jeff?

C: Not too bad. I'm visiting Australia from England. I am an Australian, but I've lived abroad for 20 odd years and I want to say how pleased I was to see how Australia has developed. But I want to get onto this question of nationalism and pride in one's country and how I feel that it can go overboard and become quite dangerous particularly in Europe, in Bosnia for example and in the Soviet Republic ...

PM: And Germany in the Second World War ...

C: Of course.

PM: The most obvious example of it, Japan in the Pacific in the 1940s. I mean I think we agree, I think nationalism, that is misplaced sense of national sentiment, self importance, superiority breeds contempt for other countries.

C: It does, it breeds intolerance.

- PM: It breeds intolerance whereas I think, you know, one's got to have that and that is one of the great things about Australia. We have never had that sense of self importance about ourselves that was in some way menacing someone else. But one thing we have had, that is a sense of tolerance and a sense of identity and I think it is important that the country understands itself, understands what it has become and is proud of what it has become. I think that is a different thing altogether.
- C: Well, it is. I am very pleased to see more and more multi-racialism in Australia and very pleased to see Afro-Caribbeans and all sorts of different races on the streets, in the cities and in the country too, I think it is a great thing.
- PM: It is, our most successful post-war change perhaps has been this change to a multi-cultural, multi-racial country and the fact that we have made the change so smoothly and so well attests, I think, to the great tolerance in this country which comes from our sense of democracy. The reasons, I think, Australians give other Australians intellectual room and space and respect comes from that sense of democracy which is very deep rooted here.
- C: I want to say too how much Australians are admired abroad, particularly in England and in Europe, generally they have a very good name and it makes me very proud.
- AC: Just on the subject of multi-culturalism, do you think that perhaps the celebration of Waltzing Matilda, getting back to that, is celebrating an Australia which is no longer there, in that now we have this incredible multi-culturalism which we didn't have 100 years ago?
- PM: A lot of what was there then isn't here now, but Australia has gone on to become a different country than that which it was, I guess all countries do this in 100 years, but we certainly have. But, the song has gone on to become part of the modern us, the modern Australia. So, it is just as capable of being celebrated, I mean look, countries rarely pick up, I mean most countries have national songs, they don't have too many of them.
- AC: You don't think that the people who are going out to Winton are going 'wow isn't it wonderful, we have got Waltzing Matilda', are crying for the days before multi-culturalism. Is that reading too much into it?
- PM: I don't think so. There would be a few conservatives around who decry the change in the place and wish we could, sort of, wind the clock back, but winding the clock back has not got much going for it.
- C: Hello, Mr Prime Minister.
- PM: Theresa, how are you doing?
- C: Very well. I just wanted to let you know that I think you are not doing a bad job.

- PM: That is kind of you, thank you.
- C: Yes, and I hope you continue to do so.
- PM: Well, we had some interesting data out last week. We had what is called the National Accounts - that is the dip stick we put into the economy every three months - and that showed that the Australian economy is growing at five per cent and with about one per cent inflation.
- C: Yes.
- PM: And you have got to go back, well probably I can't remember any year much in the post-war years where we had the concurrence of five per cent growth, one per cent inflation, four per cent employment growth. So something good is happening out there.
- C: Of course it is, and I wish you and your family all the best.
- PM: That is very kind of you, thank you.
- AC: Betty in Longreach.
- C: Good afternoon, Mr Keating.
- PM: How are you Betty?
- C: Very good thank you and yourself?
- PM: I'm great.
- C: That's good and you are doing a good job and the other one said the same thing. What interests me the most is tourism. Tourism is a great industry for the people of the interior, no matter what state we live in, and they expect an increase from 15 million to 42 million in the year 2003 I heard on the news this morning which is another great thing. But the thing which we think of a lot is trying to get tourists from every area in Australia out here and we would like to know if there is anything being done on the Kennedy development road between Winton and ... so we can get some of our tourists from up around Cairns. We hear a lot about strategy, eco-tourism, infrastructure and what have you and we all know the cost of these all weather roads are enormous, but there is other alternatives and some of the Shires have come up with, especially the ... Shire, they have got an innovative and economical efficient alternative where they use geotextiles reinforcement seal and the cost then would only be \$12 million compared with \$148 million for bitumen. And I was just wondering if we could have this road, so we would have an all weather road right up to Cairns and there is a lot of people on the coastal regions who would love to come out here and we haven't got a road that would bring them

through into Longreach to our heritage centre in Barcaldine. I was just wondering if there is anything you could possibly do about this?

PM: When the One Nation package was introduced in 1992 we were building and sealing a highway running up from South Australia, up through western NSW and into Queensland. Now, a lot of that is sealed, a bit of it is yet to be sealed, my geography lets me down here a bit, I'm not just certain where this connects up to the arterial roads and highways out through Longreach and Winton. But, I do understand the points you are making and can say that, I think, still a lot of the ethos of Australia is a celebration of the bush and the bush values.

C: This is right.

PM: And I think the places you mention, Longreach and Barcaldine ...

C: You see, they are talking about stopping the train because it is not economic run between Winton and Herindom, and if we had an all weather road there they could use that for the train and then also we can get our tourists down, we have got an all weather road then from right up in Cairns to right down through this region here and another thing there has been four generations of my family lived here in ... and still no all weather road.

PM: No, no, well you have been waiting a while haven't you.

C: Yes.

PM: You really have. Well look, we have made great strides with the national highway system which the Commonwealth runs.

C: Yes, I know, the Matilda Highway is one of the best.

PM: We run the national highways, the States run the arterial highways and arterial roads and we made this division some years ago. That is, the national highway system the Commonwealth funds and runs. The arterial roads the States do. But we have taken over some of the bigger state roads and turned them into highways and that was the one I mentioned in One Nation. Any rate I'll look my geography up as a result of your call and see whether you are actually in this system. It may be you are there and are just waiting for the favour to turn up.

C: Just waiting for that. Thank you Mr Keating.

AC: Mr Keating, you had a meeting this afternoon with some Central Queensland University students, I understand there was a bit of anger.

PM: No, there wasn't.

AC: It was foreshadowed that there might be a little bit of anger regarding HECS.

PM: No, they were really very sweet, very polite.

AC: Can you reassure them that HECS will not be increased in the Budget?

PM: No, I think you have got to understand what the issues are. They are that there is a fear on the part of students that the Government will go for up-front fees for under graduates. This has always been a furphy. I don't know how it has got around and I made very clear today and I'm happy to make clear here that this Government does not believe in full, up-front fees for university students. By contrast, my opponents in the last election, the Liberal party in the last election, wanted full fees for university students which meant that only the children of the wealthy could go to university. Now, I made the point to them, one of the ways we've taken university places from 320,000 in 1988 to 560,000 today and that is a 36 per cent increase in funding in places and the reason that has happened is because we now ask students to pay about 20 per cent of the cost of a university place in the higher education charge - HECS - but they pay it back when they get into work. But, all of that money is not kept by the Commonwealth government. It all goes back into places. So, if you take the university where I was today, Central Queensland here, about a third of those people on campus wouldn't be there without HECS. So, one of the points I'm making, you know, I've had people objecting to HECS, well HECS is the way where the young people, the children of working class people get into university. Before that it was basically preserved for people on high incomes. That is why HECS is such a fair arrangement.

The altercation I had a couple of weeks ago was with not an unemployed person, but with a student who didn't want to pay HECS. And I made the point, well, if you don't want to pay HECS give your place in university to somebody who does.

AC: Fair enough. Later on today you are heading to the Capricorn coast, what will you be doing there?

PM: Today, can I just say a couple of things, one of the things that I was very pleased to do today with Majorie Henzell who is with me in the studio is that we were with the Vice-Chancellor of the University opening the computer communications centre which the Commonwealth has just funded \$5.5 million of a \$7 million centre at the University which will virtually connect the University through the information highway and provide Central Queensland this capacity on that campus for information technology and computer technologies. That is one of the principal things I was doing today. Later on I am seeing a group of people down on the coast just to have a talk to them and to have dinner tonight with some of the business community and to just talk about issues. For instance, generally that is, business tourism and in the discussions this afternoon when I leave here I am seeing a group on the coast to talk about Shoalwater Bay which I was very pleased to be able to be involved with in preserving that wonderful

area for this community here and for posterity. So, I am looking forward to a good discussion down there.

AC: We have got one minute left, we'll go to one final call.

C: Good afternoon, Prime Minister. I would just like to say I think you are doing a pretty good job over all. However, the Government doesn't seem to be doing very much to promote 'buy Australian made', you know to promote supporting Australian companies, Australian owned companies and to buy Australian made because if we did I thought we would improve our balance of payments problem pretty quick.

PM: Well, we do encourage it, but you see, where we encourage it most is with exports. We get other people outside of Australia to buy Australia and that is where it matters most and it may just be worth your while to know this, that ten years ago we exported 14 per cent of all we produce. Today it is 22 per cent. That is an eight percentage point difference, but eight per cent of our economy is worth \$30 billion a year. So, we have got somebody buying \$30 billion of Australia out there around the world and that is the best buy Australia program I can think of.

AC: Mr Keating, thanks very much for coming in this afternoon.

PM: Thank you.

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