



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
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PM: Could I say that I was pleased that we were able to host a meeting of the Pacific Forum Environment Ministers here in Australia, in Brisbane. This is the place where we held the last meeting of the Forum. What the Forum is considering is some material that Australia has put together, scientific material, which will allow Forum countries to better assess the environmental impacts of the testing program of the French at Mururoa.

I'd like to just repeat a couple of the things that I said formally earlier and that is this is a very bad decision by France. I should have thought that international interest and the non proliferation interests would have been paramount rather than the further development of their own weapon inventory and just underline, again, that the sentiment towards this does not bear any antipathy towards the French or French culture. It is simply opposition to a bad individual decision which we would like to see changed. No doubt the Forum Leaders will consider this further at the Madang meeting and they will have something to react to in the report by the environment ministers here today. I am happy to take questions.

J: Prime Minister, how strong is the scientific evidence that will be presented today?

PM: I think you may get a look at that later and you can make your own judgement about it. But, at least we have pulled together the various disciplines - meteorology, geology-, seismic, marine et cetera - too try to make some assessment of the impact on the region and, of course, on the reef structures themselves.

J: But no matter how strong that evidence is, do you think it will have any impact on the French Government?

PM: I think the Government of France has misjudged international reaction to this. I'm quite sure President Chirac was probably advised that this

would blow over quickly. The thing that probably diserves him most is public opinion in Germany and securing a high level of intensity in European opinion is the way to prosecute this argument.

J: ... about the public, Prime Minister (inaudible) ...

PM: You can see it in the quite strong registration of opinion in European polls and also, I think, in the European Parliament and in France itself.

J: Will the Forum pursue that?

PM: We are still taking the opportunities to proselytise on the issue. I am and I think other people are too.

J: Mr Keating, in relation to the matter of the Japanese apology, a lot of the other allied countries are saying that its not good enough and saying that we have been too quick to accept his apology and that in fact we are out of step, do you agree with that?

PM: No, this is obviously a start of a period of reflection in Japan and securing such a comprehensive statement from the Prime Minister of Japan is a very good place to begin what is probably for the Japanese now a longer run assessment. You might notice that Prime Minister Murayama talked about telling the children of the undeniable truth and that is what it is about. I have said this before, I don't think the apology matters as much as the inculcation of the ideas, the history and the values in their community.

J: So, if it is good enough for us is it good enough for England and ...

PM: They can make their own minds up about this, but we are not in dispute, an international dispute, with the nation of Japan. We are debating events half a century ago.

J: You say it is the beginning of a process, what more could you be satisfied with, the Australian people be satisfied with the process ...

PM: Well, it is not the apology that matters so much. I have just said that. It is the inculcation of these values. It is like saying when will all Australian children be educated on a certain point? Well, no one can ever know, but at least it is important to start teaching the truth about this and to let this young generation of Japanese people know what really happened. That is what matters.

J: Should there be an apology from the Japanese Government, but as a whole?

PM: There has been over time, apologies. I don't think they matter as much again as the dissemination of the history and the inculcation of the values. I think that is what matters most.

- J: Are the expectations and demands of the allies then too great?
- PM: The allies, I mean, you think that they are back there and still got the hats on, still got the helmets on?
- J: Prime Minister, will Nick Greiner be campaigning on behalf of Labor at the next election?
- PM: I think Mr Greiner has hit on a very important thing in Australian public life and that is the Australian people have got a right to know what the big picture policy options are. The Australian people have got a right to know how politicians will govern Australia. They have a right to know about the directions and where Australia can be taken and how. Honour and integrity in the public debate can only come with policy and hiding from policy is not the way that Australia should be going, not the way our politics should be going at this point in our history. We need clear directions and we need them in all the things, our relationship with Asia, the development of our economy, our society, our social values. You might notice Mr Greiner talked about tax reform and the labour market. When you hear any member of the Liberal Party talk about tax reform, he is talking about the unutterable phrase - a consumption tax, a GST. You see, the Liberal Party still wants a GST. Mr Greiner is hinting at it again. Mr Howard has spent all his life committed to a GST, but now he won't say it. But, of course, do the public know, that in office, they wouldn't get a GST? Well, of course, John Howard is going to run to ground on policy and Mr Greiner saying yesterday that he is risk averse, that he won't say where he stands is only a statement of the obvious, but he is condemning it as the way forward for Australia as I do because the Government has always stood and said where the policy direction should be. Remember all those Budgets and May Statements that I personally delivered - 17 of them - four Prime Ministerial Statements, 21 major national statements - every dot point, every 'i' dotted and 't' crossed. That is what the public should expect and that is a right they should be given.

I notice that Malcolm Fraser and Tim Fischer jumped on it immediately. Tim Fischer knows exactly who Mr Greiner was talking about. He was talking about Mr Howard and Tim Fischer and Malcolm Fraser know how damaging it is for someone of Mr Greiner's standing to say that it is wrong for Mr Howard not to show the public his policy card.

- J: Mr Greiner now says that labour markets ... (inaudible) ...
- PM: Mr Greiner knew exactly who he was speaking of - Mr Howard - he said he was risk averse. He wasn't referring to me. They can say many things about me, but risk averse isn't one of them and therefore this mutter this morning on radio from Mr Fraser and Mr Fischer, they knew exactly who Mr Greiner was talking about too. What Mr Greiner is

doing now is being a loyal member of the Liberal Party this morning, running the brush over the tracks, but yesterday he was making some points which we all know are correct.

J: Given that the election campaign in Queensland, the Coalition ran exactly the same tactics as hiding away their policy until the campaign itself got underway, that was a virtual success, they went within a whisker of winning government. It must be of large concern to you facing a federal election with them running the same tactic?

PM: It would be of greater concern to the public. Let's say they had won, what would their policy mandate be? What could they do? Anything they like. That is ~~my~~ my point, honesty and integrity in politics starts with policies and I don't accept the view that it is good politics, if not good policy, I think dishonesty in this respect is both bad politics and bad policy.

J: Does that mean the Queensland government may have made a mistake in its campaign?

PM: Are you a local? Well, I'll leave you to make your judgements about it.

J: Prime Minister, is ... confusing the electorate by your response to John Howard in that at some stage you should say that he is a policy free zone, at another stage you should say he is ... to change his policy and now we are back to policy free zone ...

PM: Who said that?

J: I am paraphrasing.

PM: I think I understand the sense of your question. Let me approach it this way. John Howard has had consistent policy prejudices. One of them is to cut the wages of working Australians. Another is to stick in a GST. Another is to get rid of Medicare. They are his policy prejudices. Another is massive cuts in government spending. So, when he says we have got to take the burden of government off the back of people, that is simply code for cutting government spending. When he talks about family friendly industrial relations policies he really means cutting the wages of working Australians. So, he is trying to keep the policy detail low, but he has got all the policy prejudices right out there in the market place. That is the position. Greiner, sharing a view, I think with me, says you can be completely honest and credible in public life by putting your policies in the market place and the Australian people have a right to know. Perhaps I'm old fashioned in the view of saying that the public have a right to know where the political parties stand, root and branch, 't' crossed and 'i' dotted and slippery politics will take the nation nowhere. Thank you.

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