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# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
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**PM:** I just thought I would give you a couple of comments about President Chirac's remarks and a couple more on Premier Court and his accomplice, Mr Howard.

The first thing I think I would like to say is obviously the French President's been stung by this, by the world reaction to the test and the Government of France is rattled. He has made a number of statements today - which, I think, from Australia's point of view are ridiculous - that Australia does not provide aid to the South Pacific - where, in fact, our annual aid to Forum countries is around \$460 million. And he went on to say that French Polynesia has a higher standard of living than Australia. That is untrue. He said that the French presence in the Pacific is what rankles us. This is not so. We have always said a constructive French presence in the Pacific is a welcome one. The politics of the Pacific is a matter for the people of these French territories and the Government of France to work out over time. The simple fact is they must face the unpalatable truth that Australia opposes French nuclear testing and is not opposed to the French or the French people, but this one bad decision. And it is this one bad decision which has brought so much angst against France, not only here in Australia, but of course around the world. President Chirac said that what the Australians and New Zealanders can't stand - he talks about us together, but most of the assault of course is made upon Australia. Well, I think, we would say we are flattered to think that Australia alone, or Australia with New Zealand and some other countries, have brought this reaction. But that is not so of course. It has come from around the world and I think that is what is difficult for President Chirac to comprehend and to accept.

This can all cease and France can start rebuilding its position on nuclear issues simply by abandoning the program and that is what they should do.

Could I just say a couple of other things, domestic things, about Richard Court and that Royal Commission. As you know, there have been reports today in the press and remarks by the Leader of the National Party in Western Australia that the \$4 million plus, being spent on the Royal Commission is a very large sum of money and that it would be better spent on other public services, to which the Premier said this was merely speculation. Well speculation by the Leader of his Coalition partner seems to me to be fairly pointed. And he went on to say, after attacking me, "we have the strength of our convictions to see this matter through, regardless of his bully-boy tactics, so we can finally determine the truth in what was a very tragic incident." But it is not the tragic incident which is being investigated. Commissioner Marks has made that abundantly clear. He is not investigating the death of Penny Easton and yet that is how Mr Court, today, rationalises his continuation of this vendetta. Now Richard Court defeated Carmen Lawrence in an election. Not content with defeating her, he wants to personally destroy her. It's the nastiest, meanest, most vindictive action I think a leader of a Government has taken in my recent memory and nothing is going to detract from that until this Commission is wound up. So there is no point in Premier Court going on about the Commission or John Howard - who is today waxing lyrical about the Commission, the Commissioner and how he has been treated - but when Mr Howard was asked about the terms of reference he said "oh, I am not answering anything about that". In other words, those terms of reference, Mr Howard said he is interested in the truth, but not obviously, of course, not the whole truth. Otherwise the terms of reference would have gone to the Liberals and their shenanigans in the Western Australian Parliament on Penny Easton's behalf. So I mean the ruse and the farce goes on and it can be only settled one way and that is for it to be closed down.

J: Prime Minister, what do you say about the state of relations between Australia and France when the leader of that country tells what you described as untruths on television, and also, do you believe that France is now going to only explode another 3 bombs?

PM: I have got no idea about the second question. On the first, I think French pride has been hurt, and an executive decision has been poorly taken. And, as this was one of the earlier executive decisions of President Chirac's term of office, it has obviously reflected poorly on him, and he is feeling the pinch.

J: Mr Keating, uranium exports - do you take seriously President Chirac's statement today that they may stop buying Australian

uranium? And if they did, what would that impact have in terms of compensation?

PM: Well, I think that President Chirac would know that there is no point in a commercial spat, an ongoing commercial spat over these things. Australia supplies uranium to France under strict safeguards for use in their extensive power generation program. And I think that sort of rattling of the can is just another symptom of the reaction which, I think, the President has got to this decision.

J: Prime Minister, have you communicated with President Chirac?

PM: Not today.

J: Will you - over this attack?

PM: Well, I think I am communicating with him now, through your good offices?

J: Prime Minister, in the light of your comments about the Marks Royal Commission - is there any point in Dr Lawrence giving evidence this week, as scheduled?

PM: Yes. I think she - obviously - the Commission, in its current series of sittings, has a place there for Dr Lawrence to be heard - and she will be, and she deserves to be.

J: Prime Minister, John Howard criticised you today saying something like it's one of the nastiest things he has seen, seeing someone from your office denigrating and destroying the reputation and integrity of someone like the Royal Commissioner - I mean, do you accept that perhaps you went over the top there with that attack?

PM: No. Not at all. I said yesterday - the bad thing here was the politically motivated terms of reference. I mean, what has happened here is that Richard Court and John Howard together have decided to trash Royal Commissions as an instrument for the elucidation of information in this country. Complex data arriving from complex circumstances where a Royal Commission is a desirable power. What they are doing is trashing that as an institution, by abusing the power that the executive Government of Western Australia has. John Howard has been in this right up to his neck. And, as I said yesterday, they lit the fuse on this together, and it has blown up on them. But, here he is, in his - you know, what do you call it, his sort of mock-Sunday School piety going on now about how the Royal Commission has been treated - what about the rotten terms of reference? What about the corruption of the processes by the Government of Western Australia, in establishing this? That's what is wrong here.

- J: Do you dispute then that you have tried to trash this Royal Commission so that it is easier for you to take no notice of any adverse findings?
- PM: My view is that the Royal Commission - its terms of reference, the whole inquiry - is illegitimate. And so everything that the Government has said since it came to that conclusion has been consistent.
- J: Well, why then should Carmen Lawrence appear before an illegitimate inquiry, as you term it?
- PM: Well, she is obliged to. She has been called, and the sequence of people appearing before the Commission have painted her in a light which, she believes, is wrong.
- J: But how can she clear her name before a rotten Royal Commission?
- PM: She may not clear her name, but she will give her views.
- J: Do you think she will emerge from this bullet-proof, Mr Keating?
- PM: Well, I haven't thought about that one, Niki.
- J: Well, that is what Peter Cook said yesterday.
- PM: Did he. Yes, well, let's say she, by bringing on the Western Australian - the WA Inc Royal Commission, and living through the difficulties of that, and now having, you know, somewhere around 5 to 6 million dollars arraigned against her, wearing the thrust of the executive power of the incumbent Government of Western Australia, has obviously made her very sharp about her personal circumstances. And, I think, that much tougher.
- J: So, you're still totally convinced of the correctness of the case, or her account, of the events leading up to the tabling of that petition, are you?
- PM: Yes. But the key point is, there is no linkage - or established linkage - between the Commission and the death of Penny Easton. And were Penny Easton not to have suicided, there would not be a Royal Commission. But to have one, when the Liberal Party first raised these matters over 2 1/2 years before Mr Easton ever replied, is, of course, absolutely rotten. That's the only word for it.
- J: Didn't in fact Keith Wilson and Pam Beggs start this thing going...(inaudible)...?

PM: It doesn't matter where it started, we all hear rumours in public life - do you see me dashing into the Parliament calling Royal Commissions? Is that the track record of us? Of course it isn't. But, there is something vindictive and vicious about Richard Court - he is not simply content to have a win over Carmen Lawrence politically, he wants to destroy her personally. It's a very vicious and vindictive thing to do. Thanks.

ends.