



## PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
DOORSTOP, HIGH COMMISSIONER'S RESIDENCE, PORT MORESBY,  
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**J:** Mr Keating, do you think the presence of the French in the South Pacific is in any way delegitimised by their decision to resume nuclear testing?

**PM:** I think that there has been a constructive relationship between the French and the countries of the South Pacific and, I think, the rest of us. I don't think there is any doubt that the legitimacy of their presence or the sincerity of their presence is called into question by a scant disregard for the opinions and the interests of people who live in the Pacific - Pacific Islanders. But, that is not to make a comment about the French territories. This has always been a matter between the people who live there and France itself.

**J:** Prime Minister, what sort of statement would you be looking for out of the Forum?

**PM:** I think one that continues the themes of last year. That is, where we are looking for managing resources better. I think, Sir Julius has a theme which is consistent with that and that is how to further develop those resources, how to keep them sustainable and we are able to, I think, record from last year some substantial and positive changes - in transport, turning around some of the heavy airline deficits - I made the point a year ago that there was more money lost in the airline deficits of the Pacific countries than there was in the aid which Australia and New Zealand had given to Pacific Island nations and Pacific nations. And, we are seeing quite substantial and very pleasing changes in the budgets of those airlines and the rationalisation of those services.

Fisheries - we are seeking to improve the lot of Pacific Island countries in terms of fisheries, the benefits available to them, the prices they receive. Those are issues I have taken up with Japan, with Korea.

Logging - we are working towards a logging or forest accord at this meeting which began in Brisbane and I hope that we can come to a

point of agreement about forest management on this occasion with the signing of that accord.

So, these are the things.

- J: Haven't the Papua New Guineans and the Solomon's knocked that forestry code of conduct on the head?
- PM: They are agreeing with it, I think, but they are saying ... well, I'm not sure exactly what they are saying, but I think, in Papua New Guinea's case it is saying that it hasn't got its own domestic process in place. But, I would be very disappointed if we couldn't sign the accord up at this meeting.
- J: Prime Minister, you have offered incentives to the Solomon Islands to try and convince them to stop logging and they haven't taken those up, are you prepared yet to think about the big stick approach, withdrawing aid?
- PM: We are in a constructive, friendly relationship with the Solomon Islands and, of course, with Papua New Guinea. One seeks to encourage people to have, in this case, sustainable logging practices, to help where we can with sustainable logging processes and planning. I don't necessarily believe that people always see your side of the argument immediately, but we will keep wearing away at that as in the case of the Solomons.
- J: What about Gordon Bilney's line, that the Government will be less than willing in the future to assist those countries that are squandering their resources, just how tough is the Government prepared to be?
- PM: I think it is a case of both a bit of push and pull. We try to pull people along by encouraging them to do things and we try and push them along. But again, one does that within the sort of protocols of the relationships. It is called trying to be constructive I think.
- J: But is there point in continuing to give aid for sustainable forestry projects to a country that has anything but a sustainable industry and which is seeking to defer this code of conduct at the Forum?
- PM: Are you speaking of the Solomons in particular? Well, I mean, the Solomon Islands does not have a sustainable rate of forestry extraction or forestry management. That is an issue of concern to us. We have assisted them to understand or at least measure their forestry resources and then to be able to plot some sort of chart of extraction and sustainability. What the indications give us is that it is unsustainable. Whether the assistance for forestry is something for us to determine, but obviously there gets to a point of where the returns are not worth it.

- J: Just coming back to the point about the French test again, Prime Minister, do you think there is anything more the Forum can constructively do to argue the case against Paris?
- PM: I think the value of the Forum is for it to speak with one voice as the voice of the Pacific. There is no other meeting of a group of nations this large or this representative that could say to President Chirac and his government that this is a bad decision which we want reversed. The value of it being said in this Forum is that it is not simply Australia or New Zealand, it is the Forum countries as a whole. So, rather than new arguments, I think, the value is in the saying of it as a whole, as a community.
- J: As Chairman of the Forum though, Australia has put out a communique with the Forum against the French testing, what is this communique that is going to come out tomorrow, how is that going to be different?
- PM: I think it will have a strong condemnation of the decision of the French to test. A condemnation of the decision to detonate the first blast and calling on the Government of France to desist. Now, again, France is a sovereign country, but we will be at least saying that powerfully. I hope.
- J: Is there a danger that the fact that Australia is a member of this Forum could mean new accusations from France that we are gingering up the Pacific against them?
- PM: I think the French are worldly wise. They know what people think. They know what the general mood of the Pacific is. They don't like our attitude, but then we don't like theirs. And, I think, they know most people around here don't like them for this either. We will be saying that in spades, I hope, in the next couple of days.

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