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## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
INTERVIEW WITH MURRAY NICOLL, "DRIVE TIME", ABC RADIO 5AN  
ADELAIDE

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MN: Prime Minister, Paul Keating.

PM: How are you Murray?

MN: I'm well, thank you. You're back in the city now after being on the Peninsula?

PM: Yes.

MN: What did you say to the people of the Eyre Peninsula, and perhaps more importantly, what did they say to you?

PM: Well, the point of going was to talk about the sustainability of agriculture, and we have been now looking at regions of Australia - there is a strategy we have in South West Queensland, one in NSW and now the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, to look at support from the Federal Government, to look at ways of in which farms can be improved, to underline the importance of whole of farm management. What that means is drawing the farm so that on the good soils you grow certain crops, not all the soils will be uniform, the place won't be able to stand uniform stocking rates, in other words, getting a plan for the farm, and getting a plan for the region. And you might remember a year ago, in November last year, Bob Collins and I announced the Drought Package for the drought affected farms, and we also introduced Bonds - Farm Bonds - to smooth income out, and concessions for water and fodder. Well, during that time we started then putting a line under this question of sustainability in agriculture, and from that day to this, we have been on that subject, and today I received a report from the Land Management Task Force on this very subject. And, of course, we are seeing this put into place here in a regional way on the Eyre Peninsula.

- MN: Traditionally, of course, Liberal strongholds out in the bush - we have not seen much Labor action out in the country before now...
- PM: We have held Grey for 10 years, until we lost it last.
- MN: Yeah - you reckon you can get it back this time, right?
- PM: Well, it's a margin of a couple of percent...but look, I mean, I heard your introduction about the election and the rest, but I have been going around rural Australia now for a couple of years about this same subject. I was in Orange 2 weeks ago, I was in Roma about a month before that, in Winton in Queensland a month before that. And I think with the drought having come through, with all of the devastation it left in its wake, we have got to draw some lessons from it, and keep the momentum going towards sustainable agriculture, so that we are not seeing people walk off farms because they become marginal because they are not properly managed. I think this is the time to actually drive that lesson home.
- MN: Meantime, you are getting a bit of a jump on the Opposition Leader, John Howard?
- PM: Well, we are interested in Australian farms, and the family farm - we did as no Federal Government has ever done - we suspended the Farm Assets Test for those areas which were affected by drought, which means that now 11,000 farm families are getting income support, so we are doing these very solid and tangible things. The Farm Bonds are, I think, a great breakthrough, and I have always held the view that the family farm is the backbone of Australian agriculture - that we will get the...no one will care for agricultural land if the family walk off the farms. So, we need to keep our productivity up, and the quality of the land - the whole Landcare movement - is coming from the family farming community, and I think we - the Federal Government, certainly this Labor Government - wants to keep that going.
- MN: Did you get any reaction from out on the land at the French nuclear tests? I mean, you have been dealing with people who's livelihood is the land, and vice versa - the land is their life - and this is what it is all about - the environment - and the nuclear tests in the Pacific, and the amazing second test - a huge explosion on another Atoll - did you get any reaction from the people put on the land about that?
- PM: No, I didn't today, but I have it, of course, in many other places, and I can only agree with the sentiments I think you are expressing there implicitly, Murray. That is, this is a very foolish thing for the French Government to do. The interests of France, and every developed country, and all those people who cherish liberty, should be to diminish the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The sin that France is

committing is to say to the would-be proliferators - this is the Iraqs, Irans, the Pakistans and countries like that, who, we're told, are developing a nuclear capability - to say to them as a sort of developed democracy, well, that's okay - you can go and let your bombs off, and do as we're doing. I mean, that I think, is the principal point of objection, let alone the lack of regard for the people of the Pacific whose wishes they have simply just ignored.

MN: What about the suggestion - and it's come from many quarters of this country - that we should say to the French Ambassador in Canberra it's time you got on your bike, and that, in fact, all other countries around the world should do the same thing. How would you feel about that?

PM: Well, it's a matter of whether you do better engaging these societies and governments, than not engaging them.

MN: And that is the reason our Ambassador is still in Paris?

PM: Yes. I think we have been more effective in engaging them. As you may know, I wrote an article for *Le Monde*, I did one also for *Liberation*, and these had some influence in the French debate, and in the German debate. And I think this debate in Germany is starting now to run against the French President and he may deign to, you know, take a view askance at Australia's view, but certainly not German public opinion. But he doesn't need to go further than his own country - now, the overwhelming number of people in France now dis-favour this policy, and wish he would desist. It's all about, of course, the Second World War - it's all about saying it will never happen again. Well, they already have a stock of nuclear weapons in their inventory. The issue for France, I think, is to engage the rest of the world not to sit back with a sort of a you know, a nuclear weapon under its arm, but rather to deal with the real problems and that's the way I think France will find that it doesn't face any sort of problems that it faced in 1940.

MN: So the French Ambassador will stay in Canberra?

PM: Well, I think if we say to him go, what we are saying is that we don't want a dialogue with France, we don't want to talk to them, we don't want to have a communication with them. That seems to me to be a pretty strange policy when you object to what they are doing.

MN: Can we go any further than we have already gone - is there anything else we can do?

PM: Well, we have got the Foreign Minister at the moment at the United Nations getting a resolution together against France. We have, today at the Pacific Forum, broken off their dialogue partner status - this is the dialogue partner status that France enjoys with the

countries of the Pacific Forum, which is the Pacific Island countries, including Australia - and, as you know, our protests against France has been our strongest protest ever against a democratic state.

- MN: John Howard today has said that the Coalition is seriously considering releasing more of their policies in the lead-up to the election, and we're moving onto the fact that you are doing a lot of moving around the country at the moment, and so are a lot of others in this pre-election campaign - they're calling it a scare campaign, of course, that you are involved in. Have you seen Mr Howard's 12 point minimum standard through industrial relations?
- PM: No, I haven't. You might remember Murray - you need a bit of a memory with John Howard - but you remember before the last election, he had an Industrial Relations Bill he was going to table? And he was going to table it up until the last week of the campaign...
- MN: Well, they did run into some other problems during the campaign.
- PM: I know - but he never tabled it. He had a Bill ready, he said - the IR Bill, the Industrial Relations Bill - but we never saw it. Now, if he had it ready for March 1993, he certainly had it ready in these last couple of...because he was then the Industrial Relations spokesman. He is now the Leader of the Opposition with essentially the same view, and what we are saying to him is - I mean, he wants to cut the wages of people in the bottom deciles of income. He calls it labour market flexibility - it's basically wage cuts. People would lose penalty rates, overtime rates, holiday leave loadings without compensation in their wages. And what I have said today - and yesterday was - if Andrew Robb - their Federal Director who was on the Sunday program on Sunday saying we have got 98% of our policies prepared - why are they keeping them from the Australian public? I mean, they are not keeping them from me - I only get 1 vote in the election. It's the community of Australia who are entitled to know where the major Parties would lead them.
- MN: But it is a valid answer, when we are not officially in an election mode - it is a valid answer to say well, last time we laid it all out on the table, it got up and hit us between the eyes?
- PM: It got up and hit them between the eyes because it was no good, Murray. It's not valid for any Party to hide its policies. The Federal Government is out there with a balanced Budget - with a Budget in surplus - we say how we are doing it, we have got all the measures down there in the Budget. I mean, when I announced - with the ACTU - the Accord, we had to say how it would work, how it endorsed the 2-3% inflation rate. When I lay down the structure for the Republic, I said we are going to move to an Australian republic, and here is the model. There's no trickiness on our part. This tricky view - this sort of sneaky view - that you have policies, but you think they

are too crook to show the public because they won't like them, and you can slip them past them in the last 10 days of the poll, is, I think, high dishonesty in politics.

MN: But realistically, nobody comes up with policies they are fully convinced that the public won't like?

PM: Well, if you have got policies that you are convinced that the public won't like, why would you want to be Prime Minister of Australia? I mean, if you think your policies are going to be anathema to the community, then you ought to be out of the business. I mean, these people are saying...here's Andrew Robb - brazen as they come, out there on the *Sunday* program - saying we have got our policies 98% prepared. Well, why won't you show the Australian public, Mr Robb and Mr Howard? [And they will reply] "because I don't think they will like them".

MN: The standard question that you are getting at the moment as you move around - the election. Ralph Willis, the Treasurer, was on this radio station not so many weeks ago saying that the election will be held in the first quarter of next year - does that still hold?

PM: Well, the Treasurer doesn't speak on these matters. These matters have always been left to the Prime Minister, and every Australian Prime Minister has the discretion in this. But, I have made clear right through when I have been asked this - and remember this, first of all John Hewson started talking about an early election 15 months ago, then Alexander Downer said we were going to have an early election, then John Howard said we would have an early election, and all the pundits when the Budget came out they said "oh, surplus Budget - clearing the decks for an election". Well of course, it was all untrue. I have said right from the start that I think the public believe that Parliament - when they elect a Government - they should be able to draw the maximum advantage from the Government's work over the course of the Parliament, and that having early elections is too tricky, and not to be considered. That's always been my view.

MN: And that still holds - we won't be going to the polls before Christmas?

PM: I'm not...the chance of us going to the polls before Christmas is very, very slender indeed. But I am not saying definitely to you or to any other commentator to give away a Prime Minister's right which every Australian Prime Minister has enjoyed.

MN: So that's an almost definite?

PM: No - you'll get no more from me than that. I'm not here to make headlines for you.

MN: It's an almost definite - it's a definite should be that way?

- PM: It's a definite that the public want value from the Parliament, and they don't like politicians being tricky, pulling elections at times to suit themselves.
- MN: And the Prime Minister would never go to an election until he thought he could win it?
- PM: Well, the Prime Minister will have to go to an election within 3 years of the last Parliament sitting. It's just a matter of the Constitution.
- MN: Okay. Now, you're about to head off - in fact, I think I have held you up, I think. What are you doing in town tonight?
- PM: Well, I'm opening the restoration of the Palm House in the Gardens.
- MN: Oh, yes.
- PM: We gave \$1 million to it, under the One Nation program, which I introduced, as you know, for these public works back in 1992. Now, my last visit to Adelaide was on the One Nation train which brought the standard gauge railways for the first time from Melbourne to Adelaide. And we also had one there for heritage buildings - the restoration of heritage buildings - and this is a classic heritage building. Now, the Premier is down here tonight, and the Premier knows this - you don't get to get your name on a plaque unless you put some money in. Now so far, we haven't got any money out of him. So, all the garden types down there who support this garden, should say to him now listen Dean, if you want your name on the maker's label here, you had better get your cheque book out.
- MN: Well, if you find out a way to get a buck out of Premier Dean Brown, let me know will you - there's a lot of people who would join the queue?
- PM: Well, he always comes around asking me.
- MN: Maybe he thinks you have got a Santa wallet?
- PM: He puts on a sad face, and he thinks I'm a sucker for a sort of sad look.
- MN: Okay. Thank you - I would like to talk to you next time you're in town.
- PM: Thanks Murray.

ends.