



1

## **PRIME MINISTER**

2 July 1996

### **TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP PRESS CONFERENCE - SYDNEY**

#### **PRIME MINISTER:**

Ladies and gentlemen, the Cabinet today considered a report on the process whereby a semi-automatic shotgun is crimped, that is, you reduce its magazine capacity from five or seven down to two. Two, of course, is allowable within the Police Ministers' decision. The report we had from ballistic experts of the AFP indicated that there was a process that for all practical purposes was irreversible.

The Cabinet was not content to accept that and the Cabinet has sent the whole matter off for further examination by the ballistic experts of the Australian Defence Force, and the position of the Federal Government is that we won't be willing to accept the crimping process as coming within the Police Ministers' resolution unless it is not only certified by the ballistics experts of the Australian Federal Police but also by ballistic experts in the Defence Force and in the Police Forces of the six States and is certified as being satisfactory by the six State Premiers.

#### **JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister what then does this do to the whole process of gun control and firearms control?

#### **PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I don't think it weakens it, in fact it is further evidence of our determination to ensure that the spirit and the letter of the Police Ministers' resolution is adhered to.

**JOURNALIST:**

It doesn't slow the process down?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I don't believe it slows it down at all - at all. In fact, I think what the public wants is a set of laws that are workable but also a set of laws that give full effect to the decision of the Police Ministers. I simply wasn't prepared to accept - whilst I'm not casting any aspersions on the technical accuracy of the Federal Police report - on something as basic as this, just to accept the view of two people is not good enough as far as I am concerned and that's why the Government has insisted that it be examined by the ballistic experts from the defence forces and from the six States and I'm not prepared to support any acceptance of crimped weapons unless they pass all of those tests and clear all of those hurdles. If they do, well then that's another matter.

**JOURNALIST:**

Why did you not get the Defence examination at the same time as the AFP?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

That's a good question.

**JOURNALIST:**

When do you expect the Defence report?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I expect that it will be very soon.

**JOURNALIST:**

Where does this leave the sort of political pressure that's been coming from areas like Queensland over the use of semi-automatic and automatic weapons?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, that's a separate issue and the Attorney-General will be putting the Commonwealth Government's position on that to the Police Ministers' meeting tomorrow. He will also be tabling the report of the Federal Police ballistic experts at that meeting but he will be putting our position in relation to that. I think it is fair to say that we are very reluctant and in fact we are opposed to anything that weakens the resolution of the Police Ministers on the tenth of May.

Now, obviously there is a capacity in a number of areas to explain amplify and fine-tune, but we are not going to agree to anything and I want to make this very clear, that

compromises the spirit and the intent of what was agreed on the tenth of May and that applies in relation to crimping and it applies in other areas as well.

**JOURNALIST:**

Are your National Party colleagues in Cabinet happy with that decision today or were they arguing against that?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I'm not going to talk about what was said in Cabinet. We've taken a decision and the decision is as I have explained it, and the decision is that we intend to adhere to the spirit and the intent of the decision taken by the Police Ministers but that doesn't mean to say there isn't some area of fine-tuning and amplification which can be indulged in.

**JOURNALIST:**

Will you be making more visits to rural and regional areas?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes I will. I noticed on the wires this morning about some invitation I have rejected for a visit to Gympie. I wasn't even aware that I had received the invitation but I want to make it perfectly clear that the fact that it came from Gympie had no particular significance as far as I was concerned.

I like going to meetings as you know, and I won't be reluctant to go anywhere in Australia to face any audience to talk about any subject at all whether they are people who disagree with our decision on guns or people who disagree with what they rightly or wrongly apprehend to be our decisions in the area of higher education.

**JOURNALIST:**

Will this decision today satisfy those members on your backbench who want the change to go in favour of the crimping process?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, what I have said all along is that if you can, for all practical purposes permanently convert something which is a five or a seven shot into a two shot, and two shots were always going to be allowed, then there is no problem. But the test is whether you can do that, and I think this is sufficiently important to require all the enormous precautions and checks and double checks and triple checks that I am requiring and the Federal Government is requiring. I mean, this is a very very important thing.

If you can permanently convert them then obviously they are within the spirit of the decision but gee you've got to be absolutely certain about that and I think we are justified in seeking the views of a wide range of people and the administrative

responsibility for this is a matter for the States and I think their ballistic experts ought to be involved.

I think it is something that involves a joint co-operative decision and it will be very interesting to see what the attitude of the State ballistic experts and the army people are, and if all of them together say that for practical purposes these weapons have been permanently converted well, you obviously have a situation that you ought to have a look at.

**JOURNALIST:**

Is there any estimate of the number of weapons in Australia that may be taken...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, look, I've heard varying reports. It depends on what barrow a particular individual is pushing. The figure seems to go up and down according to which group you belong to.

**JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister you are not concerned this is all going to get bogged down in a committee somewhere are you? I mean, ADF and State police ....

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, I'm not concerned that it will. But I think it would have been unwise and wrong of the Government to have taken a decision on this matter just based on the report of three people.

**JOURNALIST:**

How long will it take do you think?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I think it will be over very quickly. The Army people are looking at it already. Look, it's not going to get bogged down in a committee Peter, there's no chance of that happening. I think it will be dealt with very very quickly.

**JOURNALIST:**

Will the Federal Government pay for crimping?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No.

**JOURNALIST:**

Earlier today Mr Costello was talking about the need for sustained budget surpluses. Will this override any doubt in the economy.....?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look, I don't know the context in which he said that. I'm very very careful about, look, I'm not going to pick up and run with something said... I'm sure the Treasurer covered everything immaculately as he always does. I'm not going to comment on comments made by commentators about my colleagues press conference when I wasn't there.

Thank you.