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# PRIME MINISTER

10 July 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD, MP  
7.30 REPORT WITH KERRY O'BRIEN**

**E & OE**.....

The Prime Minister today drew his line in the sand in the gun debate rejecting demands for so called crimping of semi-automatic weapons to keep them in circulation and heavily restricting Queensland's call for some farmers to have continued access to semi-automatics to shoot some feral animals. John Howard rejected crimping which stops the semi-automatic function of guns after a Defence Department report said it could too easily be reversed. He said today he now expected the States to fall into line with his position, but some National and even Liberal backbenchers are predicting even more political fall out from his decision, as are some State Ministers. I recorded this interview with the Prime Minister just a short while ago.

**O'BRIEN:**

John Howard on guns you've said today that you've gone as far as you'll go, no crimping and no real concessions for Queensland on semi-automatics. How confident are you that all States, including Queensland, will now respect your decree on the uniform legislation?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I hope they all will. You can't be certain until the Police Ministers' Conference takes place. We have made some accommodation for the Queensland situation in relation to feral animal culls. It would be very tightly contained. When I spoke to the Premier this afternoon he seemed pleased about that but we'll just have to wait and see, but we've looked at this inside and out and this really is our final position. We think it's a position that the great bulk of the community wants. It's a very cautious position, but it's the sort of issue where caution is a great virtue.

**O'BRIEN:**

If Queensland enshrines its proposal, that is the one that you've rejected, in legislation what will you do because that then does become effectively the bench mark for the rest of the country doesn't it?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well Kerry let's see what happens. I've been in this game long enough to know that you don't start responding to hypothetical questions like that. I've got a very cooperative association with the Queensland Government. I've tried to be very cooperative. I spoke to all the Premiers today before I made any public statement and I hope that we can have uniform legislation. I am sure that the overwhelming majority of Queenslanders want uniform legislation and the overwhelming majority of Australians want uniform legislation and I'm certain that that will be something that all of my colleagues in Government will take into account.

**O'BRIEN:**

A number of Nationals are muttering already about no crimping. Michael Cobb, who was on the Coalition Backbench Advisory Committee, says that you've guaranteed that the issue will now be a festering sore.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well Michael and I will just have to agree to disagree on that. I think the public is getting tired of the drift. I think the public has wanted the Governments of this country, having given them so much hope on the 10th of May, they want the Governments of this country to put this matter to bed and that is what I hope will happen.

**O'BRIEN:**

You've expressed appreciation to the Nationals Leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Tim Fischer, as well you might because if there is a political price to be paid it will be, almost certainly, paid by the Nationals before it's paid by the Liberals won't it?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well that makes the erroneous assumption that the National Party holds more seats in rural and regional Australia than does the Liberal Party, they don't. The Liberal Party holds more regional and rural seats than any party ...

**O'BRIEN:**

So you might share the punishment?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well if there is a punishment, yes, but I do admire the strength that Tim Fischer has displayed on this and it should be thrown in the teeth and the face of those people who, on occasions, have been critical of him. I think he's shown great guts and great determination and I thank him for that.

**O'BRIEN:**

And briefly if you'll grant me some indulgence on the ABC because you have been making a number of comments on that issue in recent times, in the election campaign you promised to maintain the ban on advertising and sponsorship in the ABC. Now you're refusing to rule it out, at least sponsorship. Where does that leave the trust that you promised to establish in Government?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I think people make a judgement about how they can trust us when they hear the Budget on the 20th of August. I'm not going to get drawn in to ruling individual things in or out in the lead up to the Budget. I am very conscious of all the commitments I made. I'm very conscious of those central commitments that I made to individuals and to families and to the maintenance of things like Medicare and I just ask that people wait until the 20th of August before they make judgements about trust.

**O'BRIEN:**

But I suppose what I'm asking is it almost sounds as if you're saying that some of your central promises are sacrosanct but others, perhaps, are not?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well Kerry I can't answer that until all of the fine print and all of the decisions involved in the Budget are delivered. Look, I place an enormous store on keeping faith with the Australian public, that to me is more important even than a bottom line. I've made that clear in the past and I make it clear again tonight that keeping that sense of trust and faith with the public is more important than some arid economic target.

**O'BRIEN:**

But we're not talking about arid economic targets now, we're talking about a very clear promise to maintain existing levels of funding to the ABC and we've seen Richard Alston, for one, say that the ABC could now, he thinks, stand to lose \$50 million, that it's actually fat, if you like. It could stand to lose 10 per cent of its budget.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well it's fair that you ask me this and it's also fair that I say to you that there are a lot of matters being considered at the present time, including funding for the ABC, and that will be revealed not later than the 20th of August and I'm really not going to say anything further at the present time and it's just not reasonable or sensible or prudent of people to try and make judgements about trust in relation to that particular issue until they know the colour of our decisions.

**O'BRIEN:**

Well more broadly you've said that the ABC is politically correct to a fault, but you haven't really elaborated on what you mean by that other than to say that it seems to be that there's some common opinion. I understand that you did say privately at a lunch recently where you were pushed on that issue that you talked about the ABC pushing an agenda of issues and one example that you gave, or the only example I think you gave, was coverage of Aboriginal issues. What sort of agenda are you talking about?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I think it is fair to say Kerry that compared with some other media outlets and some other broadcasters there is a concentration of views amongst most of the commentators and most of those who appear on the ABC which is narrower in its spectrum than you would find, for example, in some of the major newspapers. I mean, I pick up the Daily Telegraph, for example, and you can read columnist from what you might call the mild right to the mild left and on some occasions people might say from the far right through to the middle left.

**O'BRIEN:**

Some might.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Some might and I wouldn't necessarily, you know, I'm not saying that would be an unreasonable conclusion. I think it is equally fair to say that on a number of issues, and I wouldn't say Aboriginal affairs is the only one of them, a number of issues there is a narrower spectrum of views to be found amongst some ABC commentators. Now I say that ...

**O'BRIEN:**

So it's not a code word for, is it a code word for bias?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No it's a statement of fact. I mean bias is very much in the eye of the beholder and you and I have discussed these sorts of issues in the past and I dare say we'll discuss them in the future. I want to see the ABC maintained as a strong, independent, integral part of the broadcasting and public affairs system of this country. I want it to have balance at all times. I don't want it to be a body that just reflects the views of the Government of the day any more than I wanted to see it as a body that buckles the views of the Government of the day disproportionately. It is all a question of balance.

**O'BRIEN:**

John Howard thanks for talking with us.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

It's a pleasure.

Ends