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PRIME MINISTER

10 July 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD, MP
NIGHTLINE WITH PAUL LYNEHAM**

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LYNEHAM:

Prime Minister welcome again to Nightline.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's a pleasure.

LYNEHAM:

Ted Drane of the Sporting Shooters says your rejection of crimping means a big boost for his new party and a major headache for the Nationals, is he right?

PRIME MINISTER:

No I don't think he's right at all. I believe the great bulk of National Party supporters will continue to support the National Party despite some of them being unhappy about the toughness of this law. They're far more interested in other issues, particularly farmers, than this issue.

LYNEHAM:

But some Coalition backbenchers will break ranks won't they? They will speak out publicly, they will encourage doubts about the wisdom and legitimacy of the decision.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well some of them have already and that will always be the case. I mean, one of the things people have got to get used to is that we are not an authoritarian party, we do allow people to have a view. Even at the height of his power Menzies had constant criticism on particular issues from certain people and my government is no different so people should understand ...

LYNEHAM:

Howard's going to let all the flowers bloom is he?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, let all the flowers bloom but he's not so paranoid that he expects every single person on every single issue to sing from the same hymn sheet.

LYNEHAM:

But he needs the Premiers to sing from the same hymn sheet doesn't he, on this issue?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well there was an agreement and I'm hopeful that that agreement of the 10th of May will be carried forward and I had quite a productive round of discussions with all of the Premiers today.

LYNEHAM:

They'll ignore Wilson Tuckey when he says he hopes they get out of step with you?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I think you can ask the individual Premiers what they're going to do and I never presume to speak for Premiers, it's a very very hazardous undertaking.

LYNEHAM:

Ted Drane says just and fair compensation means that every gun has to be individually valued, not just bought back and a flat rate for each type of weapon. Do you go along with that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I go along with the commitments of what is just and fair. I think he's arguing a bit of an ambit case. I can promise him that people will be properly compensated for the weapons they hand in.

LYNEHAM:

And will proper enforcement of the stricter laws mean police raiding homes, searching farms?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that's a matter for the individual State authorities. I mean, I don't control ...

LYNEHAM:

It would cause a lot of tension in the bush.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I don't, look, I'm sure the law will be administered intelligently, I'm certain of that. But how it is administered will be a matter for individual State police forces. I think to talk in those sort of melodramatic terms about dawn raids and everything is a touch melodramatic.

LYNEHAM:

If the local police sergeant knows the farmer down the road has got a shotgun that hasn't been handed in, what is he to do?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that is a matter for the police authorities. I'm simply not going to set myself up as a judge and jury of the conduct of local police.

LYNEHAM:

The proposal to fit V-Chips to TVs to screen out violent programs, Sony in Australia says we do not have any technical information on how precisely the V-Chip works, Panasonic say it would take two years before chips were starting to be fitted. It's a bit far down the track by the sounds of it.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes but we didn't say it was the be all and end all. The thrust of what we said yesterday was to give more authority back to parents. We particularly emphasised the desirability of certain programs being shown later at night. We emphasise the importance of having representatives of, sort of, the mainstream of Australian parents on censorship classification laws. The V-Chip is part of a series of decisions. Paul, I'm not saying that what we announced yesterday is going to abolish violence in the Australian community any more than banning semi-automatic weapons, but you have a responsibility to make a contribution and if you sit on your hands and do nothing what point is there in you being a government?

LYNEHAM:

The Century Zinc project, Prime Minister, how much weight should be given to the views of the Aboriginal people of the Gulf region before the mine goes ahead?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well an enormous amount.

LYNEHAM:

A decisive amount?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well an enormous amount. What I would like to see is the people of the region and the company agree and, if necessary, the two governments pass legislation facilitating the project. It is the biggest zinc mine in the world, potentially. There are enormous benefits for the Aboriginal community if it goes ahead. If it falls over it will be seen by many as a sign that reconciliation and cooperation can't work.

LYNEHAM:

Is there a point though where the national interest overwhelms the Aboriginal interest?

PRIME MINISTER:

Speaking generally, yes. There is always the situation where the aggregate national interest is more important than the interests of a section of the community.

LYNEHAM:

As with guns and shooters?

PRIME MINISTER:

Exactly. Of course, it always is, that's the general principle. The question of whether that has arisen in this situation is not something I see any merit in commenting on at the moment.

LYNEHAM:

Finally and very quickly, what are the odds of the double-dissolution in the next twelve to eighteen months do you think?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh look it's a possibility, I'm not a gambling man, I don't understand odds all that well. I think it's fair to say that I would like to have three years of government before the next election.

LYNEHAM:

But you didn't get elected to sit there with your major pieces of legislation blocked, did you?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, no, no but I also didn't get elected to be provoked into saying things that ought to remain unsaid, at least for the time being.

LYNEHAM:

Prime Minister thanks for your time.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's a pleasure.

Ends.