



PRIME MINISTER

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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD SATTLER, RADIO 6 PR**

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SATTLER:

Joining me now is Prime Minister John Howard. Welcome to the programme.

PRIME MINISTER:

Good morning Howard. How are you?

SATTLER:

Good. Will you accept Mr Cowan's advice and butt out of this issue?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it's not an issue entirely for the states. I mean, that's just not realistic. It's not correct. I think the Australian public would be perfectly astonished if the Federal Government suddenly lost interest in it. It's true that the great bulk of what we set out to achieve on the 10th May has been achieved and it would be a mistake for anybody to see the disagreements which may emerge. We don't know for certain on the crimping issue as the be all and end all of uniform gun control law, the I would say 80 - 90% of what was agreed on 10th May will certainly be given effect to in the legislation of the various states.

SATTLER:

So you're not going to press the crimping issue if it comes to the crunch. Is that what you're saying?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, no, just let me... I'm just trying to deal with the think in a calm, unemotive manner. I think some sort of lowering of the temperature on the whole issue is desirable. What I am saying is that the great bulk of what was agreed has already been clearly put into legislation or is going to be put into legislation. There is this one final outstanding element. I think it is the only area that's outstanding. I won't know the final attitude of the states and it's not a question of my butting in. What happened earlier this week was that we had a discussion and we decided that because the material then in front of us was not completely unambiguous about crimping. In other words we weren't completely satisfied that a semi automatic weapon having a magazine capacity of five or more could be permanently and irrevocably reduced to, and even Ted Drane, the head of the Shooters' Association said that anything can be reversed, because we weren't utterly and completely beyond all doubt satisfied, we decided against crimping, and I rang each of the State Premiers, including Mr Court, who was then in Japan, to inform him of the attitude of the Federal Government, that the attitude we would be taking to the Police Ministers' Conference.

Now the Police Ministers' Conference is chaired by the Federal Attorney General so in no sense is the Commonwealth butting in to something that doesn't concern it. We do have a national responsibility. We have control over the import of firearms and people have made great efforts up until now to get uniformity and complete agreement, and we will be asking the states at the meeting next week to accept our view that crimping should not be allowed, should not be seen as consistent with the decision that was taken by the Police Ministers' Conference.

SATTLER:

Well Prime Minister, are you aware that the South Australian Police Minister, Mr Baker, is going to put forward a plan at that meeting? He says that using a three part crimping process involving machining, welding and resin - I don't know how all that works - would be effective and irreversible.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well lots of people are putting proposals. I mean, let me illustrate, for example, we had before us some information from the Federal Police which suggested that a single, continuous crimp was irreversible. The defence authorities said that that particular crimp could be reversed within an hour. Now there may be other methods of crimping that people will argue for but could I say Howard, that in the end, out there amongst the great bulk of the Australian community, the impression would gather that in some way the decision originally taken on the tenth of May was being watered down and that people were walking away from it. Now, I know that some people are inconvenienced by this decision and I know that some sporting shooters who are perfectly law abiding Australians feel very deeply that we are interfering with their personal liberty.

SATTLER:

Yes but it is better than it dying at the end of an automatic gun.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, of course it is. And there are many instances where for the greater good, a small minority are personally inconvenienced and we are not going to take away their property without paying them proper compensation. We are not going to expropriate their property. We are going to pay them proper compensation and it is also fair to say that there will still be many varieties of weapons that are still perfectly lawful. People will still be able to use single shot bolt action weapons for professional shooting, for sporting shooting purposes. There will be a lot of weapons that are still authorised. Farmers will still be able to use if they can demonstrate the need, low-powered semi-automatic weapons. We are not taking all weapons out....

SATTLER:

Well, you are taking very few, in fact if you saw that line up on *Sixty Minutes* of the weapons that will be taken out they are really only military weapons anyway.

PRIME MINISTER:

But you could see the devastating difference in the fire capacity of the ones we are taking out. And the agreement that was made on the tenth of May was that all semi-automatic weapons except for the specified categories such as police, the army and primary producers who can demonstrate a need and we have indicated a disposition in a very narrow additional area in response to what the Queensland Government put to us for feral animals and I would imagine that the Western Australian Government would be happy with that. In fact Mr Court indicated to me last Tuesday that he was happy with that. Now, I think that the position we are putting is a reasonable position and I hope that all of the governments of Australia and the Premier of New South Wales and the Premier of Victoria have both indicated to me that they support the Commonwealth position and those two men come from different sides of the political spectrum.

SATTLER:

Prime Minister if you can't get that national uniformity on this at the Police Ministers' Conference, is a national referendum a possibility because I note that the Opposition Leader Kim Beazley says he'd support it, and just an hour ago, Cheryl Kernot of the Democrats and that's important to Senate vote, she says she'd support a referendum as well if you can't get uniformity.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, Howard, I'm not going to start speculating about referenda. I mean, calling for referenda, it's like calling for resignations. It's an easy cheap shot.

SATTLER:

It goes on every week doesn't it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it is easy when you are in Opposition to say that. I mean, I guess on occasions I used to too, and I understand, and can I say I appreciate the support that both Kim Beazley and Cheryl Kernot have given me on this issue and I don't want to let the opportunity go by without saying that and can I also say that I appreciate thus far the support that I have received from the Western Australian Government and from Richard Court. I mean, I do want this thing to be discussed in a civil, courteous manner. I don't think it's an occasion for people telling others to butt out or butt in. I mean, we all have responsibilities in this. I respect the role of the States and could I say to my friend, Hendy Cowan, that I'd be, I will stop having to, you know, being involved in matters relating to guns as soon as we get the uniform laws bedded down.

SATTLER:

Now he didn't say he wasn't your friend, he just said that it was a States issue.

PRIME MINISTER:

No he wasn't my friend either, I said my friend. I just think that this is not a matter of, sort of, some you know argument debating point about whether it's the responsibility of the States or the responsibility of the Commonwealth - it's a collective responsibility. We are expected on something like this to give a lead. We've put a view. We have achieved 90% of what we set out to achieve. The remaining 10% and that's all it is, revolves around this issue of crimping.

There is overwhelming community....

SATTLER:

But sorry Prime Minister, I need to know, are you going to, are you likely in any way to give ground on that issue of crimping?

PRIME MINISTER:

We have discussed it at great length and we are satisfied on the material that was before us when we discussed it. We are satisfied that we shouldn't allow it, and that's the position that we will be taking.

SATTLER:

But you could be convinced otherwise if you received information not available so far?

PRIME MINISTER:

There's got to be an end point. I mean, people keep putting up different theories. The information available to us indicates that it is not on and that's the decision that we've taken and that's the firm position, the firm position...

SATTLER:

The final position?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh look Howard, of course it is a firm and final position that we've taken to the, that we are going to take to the Police Ministers' Conference. Now, obviously at the end of the day, the States have got to pass legislation because they've got the constitutional authority but I just hope that all of them bear in mind that there was great hope and there were great expectations all around Australia on the tenth of May when that decision was taken. That decision included a total ban on semi-automatic weapons except in the limited exemptions that were agreed to.

SATTLER:

Prime Minister do you think that Australians and, particularly politicians, have forgotten a little six year old girl who died at the end of an automatic weapon after her mother and three year old sister were gunned down in front of her and all the 34 other people who died there in Port Arthur, that the whole thing has been overtaken by policy?

PRIME MINISTER:

Look, I'm not going to say that. I'm not going to criticise the bona fides and good intentions of people who may disagree with me on some aspects of this issue. That would be a cheap shot, and it wouldn't be worth of the unanimity that I'm endeavouring to achieve on this issue. But I also ask of those and, including my own party members and people in other parties, to understand that the Australian public invested enormous hope in that decision of the Police Ministers on the tenth of May and if they feel that they've been let down, if they feel that the intent of that decision has been watered down under pressure then I think the process will be diminished. The people's respect for the capacity of government leaders of all political persuasions across the Commonwealth and State divided to reach agreement on important national issues, but in some way that capacity has been diminished and I don't think anybody involved in this issue should underestimate that the expectation of the great bulk of the Australian community in both city and country areas.

SATTLER:

Well that's true by the way because I was in Port Hedland last week and they're all for you let me tell you.

PRIME MINISTER:

Look right across the nation people were, you know, almost they were really, really gratified that their leaders could come together on something like this and if they think that that's been watered down, and you know as well as I do the perceptions in politics are as important as the realities and if they think that that decision is being compromised or watered down then they're going to think poorly and less well of all of us and I just hope that my colleagues understand that. My reading of the bush is that it's not, it's an unfortunate use of words but, up in arms over this issue. That's not my reading.

SATTLER:

No they're not. I spoke to several pastoralists in Port Hedland last week and they don't understand why anybody would want an automatic weapon.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that's right, or a semi-automatic weapon and it is not the farmers who are up, I mean, the sporting shooters are unhappy, I acknowledge that, they are being inconvenienced, they are being required to hand in their semi-automatic weapons, I'm sorry about that, I apologise to them, I don't regard them as criminals, I don't regard them as un-Australian, I'm simply saying that the national good requires that we have this tough law. We will pay you fair proper compensation, you will still be able to be sporting shooters but you'll have to use a weapon that is not a semi-automatic weapon. Now that is all we're asking. Now I know for some of them that's a big ask, but other people have had to accept restrictions in the name of the common good in the past. We're not branding them as criminals, we're simply asking them to accept the national good and we're going to pay them proper compensation. Now I think, you know that's the bottom line of it, I don't think it's an unreasonable proposition. I believe in it very strongly, we've achieved 90 per cent and I think the Australian people will applaud their system, they will applaud their political leaders if we can achieve that extra 10 per cent. Now it's in the hands, cooperatively, of the States and the Commonwealth next week to achieve and I hope we do.

SATTLER:

Final question, are you yourself going to go along to that meeting next week?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I wouldn't normally go to those meetings.

SATTLER:

You went to the first one you thought it was that important?

PRIME MINISTER:

The meeting is in Canberra and I will be in Canberra, so it happens, all of next week, but I, at this stage, don't have plans to go to the meeting although I will be in the same city where the meeting is taking place.

SATTLER:

So if you're welcome you'll go?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'll just repeat what I said, at this stage I don't have plans to go, however, the meeting is in Canberra and I will be in Canberra, as it happens, all of next week attending to all of the other things and I must say that there's ...

SATTLER:

Hendy Cowan will be pleased to hear this.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I mean I should say to Hendy that if we could, sort of, get the whole thing wrapped up I'll then have even more time to spend overseeing sensible decisions, like the one we have taken in relation to the forest industry and the various intelligent decisions, I believe, we've taken in relation to violence on television and censorship. I think the Commonwealth, in cooperation with the States, is taking a large number of very sensible decisions and I would imagine that the decision the Federal Government has taken on the forest industry would be very warmly supported by the Western Australian Government.

SATTLER:

Indeed. I appreciate your valuable time today. Have a good weekend and we'll talk to you again soon.

PRIME MINISTER:

Okay then.

Ends.