



# PRIME MINISTER

24 October 1996

**\*\*\*ADDENDUM\*\*\***

**EXCERPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
DURING 10.00AM NEWSBREAK  
JOHN LAWS PROGRAMME - RADIO 2UE**

E&OE.....

(10.00am News break)...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well that's why the only sensible way is to ask me what I'm going to do on particular issues and that has been the stance that I've taken all along on this issue that if you want to know what my Government stands for and what I believe in then I will tell you, on any issue. Not, you know, do I agree or disagree with the perception that some people in a poll may have had about a speech they haven't read. I mean, if you want to know my view on immigration levels, I'll tell you. If you want to know my view on the racial tolerance of this country, I'll express it. If you want to know whether I believe Asian Australians have made a contribution to this country, I will tell you they have, they've made a very positive contribution.

**LAWS:**

Sure, and you and I have discussed all this before in length anyway.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

And it's a magnificent contribution and I don't want them denigrated. I don't want them unfairly criticised. It would be wrong and insensitive in the extreme if that were to happen in our country. They were welcomed into this country, they have made a contribution,

they've tried to build their lives and their homes in this country and they're entitled to proper, decent respect like the rest of us.

**LAWS:**

Do you find it offensive if they are likely to be denigrated in the light of statements that are made which are inaccurate, do you find it offensive that it's a possibility that they and their children, the next generation, could be denigrated?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look, I don't want anybody denigrated because of their racial background. I don't. And there's always a fine line between robust debate and language that is insensitive to somebody's background. But I think part of the difficulty of this whole debate is that there has been a tendency over recent years that if anybody has criticised or challenged the prevailing orthodoxy on immigration or multiculturalism, they have been branded as being intolerant or bigoted. I think that has contributed to the build up of, sort of, perhaps uninformed resentment in the community. And it's far better to have an open debate about these things but the responsibility is on those participating in the debate, there's a responsibility on me, on you, on Kim Beazley, on other people, to say: right, let's have the debate, let's hear it from those people who think, for example, we should have no immigration at all, up to those people who think we should have a big increase in immigration. But let us, in the course of conducting that debate, understand that this is a tolerant country. It was built on the effort and the contribution of people from many parts of the world, including most recently from South East Asia. They've all made their contribution. They're all part of the Australian family and they're all entitled to be treated decently as part of the Australian family.

**LAWS:**

Are you aware that the Mayor of Port Lincoln said that inter-racial children were mongrels? That was said in...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, that is a very insensitive remark. I've met that man. He's got the self-proclaimed association with the League of Rights. Well, the League of Rights, according to my understanding of these things, has an appalling record of anti-semitism for example. And I have said in the past that it's an organisation that I certainly don't want to have anything to do with and it's not the sort of organisation that represents my values or the values of my Government. But to the extent that it operates within the law, then in a society it exists.

**LAWS:**

Well he says he's simply exercising freedom of speech.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I'm exercising freedom of speech in saying that it's a very insensitive, cruel, remark to make. I mean, I have a freedom of speech to say that...I mean, isn't this ridiculous, he's the Mayor of Port Lincoln, eight or nine people have resigned.

**LAWS:**

It is ridiculous.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I mean, you're asking me a question about it on the biggest rating radio show in Australia.

**LAWS:**

Yeah, but the reason I'm asking you is...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I mean, you know, doesn't that ask some question about the sense of perspective of this debate. Isn't it a good idea that perhaps we set the example and started talking about something else?

**LAWS:**

No, because I think that once you've clarified it - and you see, that's what you're now doing - I would think that...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

All I'm doing is repeating what I've said before. John, John, with a great respect...

**LAWS:**

But you've got to say it in association to the reaction of the people. I mean, they're your people, they voted for you.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I am very grateful that they supported me...

**LAWS:**

...and they want to know what you think...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

...and I don't take that support for granted. I reckon that most of your listeners out there have probably heard me say some of these things before.

**LAWS:**

So that would indicate, in light of the polls, that most of them disagree with you on this.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, I think actually they would say they've agreed with what I've said this morning. Some of them may not agree with everything I've said about everything. But they would agree with the fact that I support an open debate on immigration. They would agree, I believe, that in the past whenever you've tried to raise the subject of immigration they've been banged on the head. And I think they would also accept the fact, believe very strongly, that they are insulted in the extreme when they are told by some people that this country has a racist, bigoted background. I mean, of course there are some racists and bigots in Australia, and of course there are things in our past that we should be ashamed of like every other country. But this country has had an incredible record of tolerance, of decency, of egalitarianism, a capacity to absorb people from all around the world and produce a marvellously new and different country.