



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
A CURRENT AFFAIR WITH RAY MARTIN**

E & OE.....

MARTIN:

Prime Minister, droughts and bush fires and floods and the banks. The bush deserves a break, doesn't it?

PRIME MINISTER:

It sure does and the spirit of those people is just amazing. I went to part of Queensland a few months ago and visited a group of people who hadn't sort of had any rain for about five years and the amazing thing is that they still have this optimistic attitude, and I just want to say on behalf of the rest of the Australian people that all the help that is reasonably needed is available. We've already sent one C 130 and another one is on the way and as further requests are made then they will be responded to.

MARTIN:

They lost their abattoirs as well, that was burnt down, they can't take a trick in Charleville.

PRIME MINISTER:

No they really can't and I think the "pluck" evident in the voice of that person is just amazing and it's the sort of thing that makes Australians who have lived all their life in the big cities feel that rural Australia is a part of this country that must never be lost.

MARTIN:

Yes, thank you for your time, for joining us tonight by the way. On another matter, I take it that you are not a born-again republican?

PRIME MINISTER:

No I'm not but I am a born, a long term believer that the Constitution belongs to the Australian people and that I am having a convention because I promised the Australian people I would. I am doing exactly as I told them I would do.

MARTIN:

But you're still reluctant?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I am not reluctant to do as I said I would do. Look, let's make it very clear. At the end of the day the Australian people will decide whether or not this country becomes a republic. I have always been upfront about my own views but I have always said at the end of the day it's not my view or Kim Beazley's view that counts, it's the view of the...

MARTIN:

Will we still have that vote by the year 2000?

PRIME MINISTER:

People will have a vote on this issue by the year 2000, I've said that. That was part of our policy and, but I also said that it would be preceded by a convention and at the end of the day we have to get it right. There is no such thing as a practice republic. We have a very stable system at the present time and if we are to change it we must be absolutely certain that the system to which we are changing it is as good or if not better. Now, having a convention will ensure that all of the problems are teased out. Everybody will have a say. It won't be run by the politicians.

MARTIN:

Especially young Australians. You may..

PRIME MINISTER:

Young Australians are guaranteed a voice because amongst those who will be selected by the Government will be a portion for Aboriginals and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and also for people between the ages of 18 and 24 who mightn't normally expect to be elected. Now if some of those who are elected as part of the general community portion, they will be additional young people at the convention.

MARTIN:

All right. A couple of quickies. I mean, is it worth dividing Australia about and is it worth \$50 million we hear it's going to cost?

PRIME MINISTER:

If people want the thing properly debated, this is the best way to do it. I don't want this issue to divide Australia.

MARTIN:

It probably will though, won't it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the only way that it won't divide Australia is if people debate it sensibly. I didn't start the push for a republic in this country. It was started by others but at the end of the day, I believe that the people own the Constitution and if you have a convention which debates all of the issues, you are less likely for it to be divisive and my plea to the Australian people is that this issue not be divisive. Mind you, this is not the most important issue this country faces.

MARTIN:

No, you've made the point it's not one of your priorities, is it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it's not. I mean, I am more interested in getting young people into jobs. I am more interested in..

MARTIN:

\$50 million would go a long way in getting people jobs, wouldn't it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that is an argument for doing of course nothing. I mean, one is damned if one does, or damned if one doesn't. If we had walked away from our commitment to have a convention and we did absolutely nothing, Ray, you know as well as I do that I would be assailed every day by most people in the media who on this issue are more fanatical than the rest of the community.

MARTIN:

But you certainly think, I mean, you have made it clear you think if it aint broke, don't try and fix it.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that is my personal view, yes and I have never disguised that. I didn't disguise it before the last election and I don't disguise it now but I respect the fact that other people in the community have a different view, including many people in my own party

and therefore the fair, decent, open, honest thing to do, the democratic thing to do is to give people a vehicle to debate it. If a consensus emerges you put that consensus. If you don't get a consensus you then try and suss out the views of people by indicative plebiscite.

MARTIN:

All right. Another quick issue then. Did you ask for Senator Bob Woods' resignation?

PRIME MINISTER:

No.

MARTIN:

Did you know about it, the Federal Police were investigating it?

PRIME MINISTER:

He told me ten days ago that a completely baseless allegation about his expense accounts had been made and that was being investigated.

MARTIN:

How about the apprehended violence order?

PRIME MINISTER:

No he did not tell me about that. I have only learnt about that along with everybody else quite recently. He did not tell me about that. He is resigning from the Parliament. I don't want to say any more.

MARTIN:

Okay.

PRIME MINISTER:

He's entitled to a presumption of innocence and privacy like everybody else.

MARTIN:

All right. Thank you for your time.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's a pleasure.