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PRIME MINISTER

8 February 1997

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP DOORSTOP - ANU, CANBERRA

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...I'm talking to everybody. I expect to have a meeting next week with, a combined meeting, with representatives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the mining industry and the pastoral industry. I'm trying to see if there is some common ground, there may be there may not be, but I'm prepared to try. And there is a willingness on the part of everybody to talk together. It's a difficult issue and as I said in my speech to the conference there is no monopoly of moral righteousness held by any one group so far as the issue is concerned. Everybody has legitimate concerns. The Wik decision overturned one of the key bases of the original Native Title legislation and it's not realistic to pretend that nothing has happened.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't find anything that the National Party has done or said as being unhelpful.

JOURNALIST:

Is the *Racial Discrimination Act* on the table at this stage?

PRIME MINISTER:

I couldn't hear that.

JOURNALIST:

Is the *Racial Discrimination Act* on the table? Is it open to negotiation?

PRIME MINISTER:

There is nothing which is, in terms of legislation, which is absolutely sacrosanct. What is sacrosanct in this country is racial equality. The way in which we express racial equality can be a matter of legitimate debate at the margins. But racial equality itself of course is sacrosanct but I'm not going to rule legislative changes out or in at this stage. What I'm trying to do in a spirit of good will is to see if we can't find some common ground. I've listened to the Aboriginal people carefully, they have concerns and rights. The farmers have concerns and rights. If your family has held a pastoral lease for years on a certain basis and then out of the blue the basis of that is overturned by the courts, you have a right to say that's not necessarily fair. So there are all points of view on something like this and people have to show a bit of patience and restraint and we might be able to get common ground and we may not and if we can then obviously the Government will have to take certain decisions.

JOURNALIST:

Land is a pivotal religious issue to the Aboriginal communities. You're here at a conference which is about religious values, how does that equate in an economical rationale about the use of land?

PRIME MINISTER:

You've got to accommodate all of those concerns and I'm quite certain we can.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

I couldn't hear that I'm sorry.

JOURNALIST:

Given the National Party's put such a strong position doesn't that go against what the Government's been trying to say that there are no options being rule out or ruled in?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, I don't find anything the National Party's said...well, I'm not concerned about it. I understand the view of rank and file National Party members, it's all part of the richness of the debate.

JOURNALIST:

Have you ruled out extinguishment?

PRIME MINISTER:

Look, I'm simply not going to rule things in and out at this stage. I am going to do what I have persistently said from day one I would do, that is talk to everybody which I've done. I'm going to convene a meeting next week which brings all of the parties at a national level together. If something emerges from that, that's terrific. If it doesn't then an attempt will have been made and the Government will then have to make a conscientious decision to try and meet its twin objectives of justice and certainty. Thank you.

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