



## **PRIME MINISTER**

12 March 1997

### **TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD, MP DOORSTOP INTERVIEW - ECHUCA**

E&OE.....

I'd like to start this river-side press conference by inviting all of the community groups of Echuca and the surrounding districts, the local service clubs, interested businesses and other community organisations to participate in and get behind the Government's work for the dole scheme. It does have a lot of strong support. It is seen as one of the ways of tackling the problem of unemployment and I hope that this district contributes mightily to the community effort to get behind the scheme. The details of it were endorsed yesterday. We'll be introducing the legislation next week. I want to know where the other parties stand. Are they for or against changing the Act so that people can be required to do some work in return for the dole? That's the major change that we're proposing and I don't want any of this shilly shally-ing around of, you know, 'we'll try and amend it but we'll sort of let it through but we'll still reserve the right to knock it off'. Now are they for or against it? We're for it, are they against it? I think the Australian people want to know where they stand.

#### **JOURNALIST:**

...(inaudible)...Mr Beazley says that the Labor Party will pass the legislation but he has attacked it as unfair. He was suggesting that young people, young unemployed in Woollstonecraft would get to lie in in bed in the morning.

#### **PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I don't know why he's dragging Wollstonecraft into it. Is he, sort of, trying to get some kind of class jealousy into this. Unemployed people are the same all around Australia and what we are fairly doing, fairly doing, is to focus initially on those areas of very high unemployment. There's absolutely no intention on our part to advantage one particular group of unemployed people, that is absurd class prejudice and I'm rather disappointed that my opponent should have brought such elements into a debate about an important national issue. I just want to know whether they are for or against the compulsory element. Because I keep reading where they're going to let the

legislation through but they're against compulsion. Well you can't have it both ways, you're either for or against the compulsory element and I'd like to know precisely what their position is on that aspect of it.

**JOURNALIST:**

...(inaudible)...your actuarial advisory committee that you set up last year was to report on the Super surcharge on October the 30th.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

The which, I'm sorry?

**JOURNALIST:**

...(inaudible)...the actuarial advisory committee set up to look into the super surcharge. Nick Sherry says that you are holding the information from that back because it was damning, and he says that the super surcharge wasn't viable. Is this true?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I haven't the faintest idea. You'll have to ask Peter Costello that. I don't know what's happened to that committee.

**JOURNALIST:**

...(inaudible)...Are you going to release your legal advice on the superannuation surcharge?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well whatever Peter Costello said about that this morning is the Government's response. He made it clear that like any other piece of legislation we got advice that it was constitutional. I think he also said that in the light of the opinion that was tabled yesterday he's seeking further advice. But our position is that this is a fair measure. The Labor Party is trying to destroy a fair element of the budget. The Labor Party is trying to reduce the budget to a document that only effects middle and low income earners in the Australian community. What kind of Australian justice is that?

**JOURNALIST:**

You say you're not going to back down but Peter Costello says he's going to review the advice. If the advice tells him it is unconstitutional, are you going to back down?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

You heard what I said yesterday.

**JOURNALIST:**

Mr Howard can you give an iron clad assurance that Super members on less than \$70 000 won't have to pay this surcharge?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I can give you an iron clad assurance that we will implement the policy announced by the Treasurer on budget night.

**JOURNALIST:**

How are you going to ensure that people submit their tax file numbers though so that people....?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Oh look, I'm not going to give a detailed commentary on administrative matters. But what I am going to do is to firstly assert the fairness of the measures, secondly, condemn the Labor Party for trying to sabotage a fair measure, and thirdly repeat that when we put the legislation together we were told it was perfectly constitutional.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible) But Mr Howard, estimates say that enforcing tax file numbers being lodged will cost a great deal of money to the Government or to Superannuation companies which they are not going to...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well of course superannuation funds are speaking out of self-interest. What the superannuation funds want is to encumber every business man and woman in this country with administrative complexities. The superannuation funds are talking out of their pockets on this issue. They are a section of the Australian economy that has privileged access to the resources of Australians because superannuation contributions are compulsory. They have been against this from day one because it effects them. Now, there's nothing high and mighty or altruistic about that. I mean, let's call a spade a spade. The funds are trying to destroy this because it effects them. I'm trying to defend it because it's fair.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible) Does it concern you being on the Murray today to know that in the future it may be controlled by small .... Australians...?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes it does. I think the water of this nation belongs to all Australians. And the notion that one group of Australians should own water and that other Australians should be

tenants of that ownership is quite unacceptable. The water of the nation belongs to the entire nation.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, we are looking at the whole Native Title issue at the present time and I'm not going to sort of respond in a piece-meal fashion. I know it's a difficult problem. I'm addressing it. I'm going to produce a result that is fair to everybody.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I expressed my concern the other day about certain people who couldn't get legal aid and it's quite wrong that if the situation is that some people involved can get legal but others can't.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, it could be made fair.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

(inaudible)... Well, we're just looking at the possibility of it because there has been a great improvement in it. But it hasn't got beyond that and you really have to pursue that with the Defence Minister, I don't have all the details I'm sorry.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

The clubs? Yes.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well we don't intend to tax clubs.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, we don't intend to do it.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I've generally followed it. Have you got a general question about it?

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well that's something that will be looked at in the budget context.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I mean, we're sympathetic. Bruce Reid talks to me about it every week. He never gives me any peace on it. But we've got to look at in the budget.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yeah sure, go ahead.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well we want a system which is fair. I would be concerned if under Native Title procedures a claimant had legal aid but a respondent didn't and we will do something about that if that is the case. We'll have a level playing field - dare I use that dreaded expression.

**JOURNALIST:**

(Inaudible)

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, what I will do is have a fair approach to legal aid. What that fair approach involves is that people are on an equal footing. And at the moment many farmers and local government groups claim they are not and I expressed my concern about that the other day when I was asked this question. And if that is the case - and I'm having it investigated further - then I will do something to make it fair.

Thank you.