



PRIME MINISTER

14 May 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
RADIO INTERVIEW WITH MIKE JEFFRIES - 2GB**

E&OE.....

JEFFRIES:

Now, the Premier Bob Carr says you are letting down the people of the Hunter region by not coming to the party with \$10 million worth of federal money. What do you say?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, he's wrong. And he wasn't properly advised about what I said in the Parliament this afternoon. What I said was that I didn't agree with how he wanted to spend the money but that the federal government would provide the same resources, that's at least \$10 million towards a programme of easing the transitional impact of the BHP decision on the Hunter Valley. At no stage did I say we weren't prepared to help. I merely said that we weren't going to automatically endorse with commonwealth money Mr Carr's particular proposal and I would ask Mr Carr to sort of stop any political point scoring. If he were really interested in the welfare of the people of Newcastle he would have rung me before going public and said precisely what has happened. Now, we are prepared to help. We don't think what Mr Carr has proposed is the most efficient way of spending either the money under his control or the money under my control and we also think BHP should make a bigger contribution. Now, I'll be talking to the company about that but this is not something where Mr Carr as the Labor Premier of NSW and John Howard as the Liberal Prime Minister of Australia should be pitted against each other, we should be working together. He came to see me the other day, I listened to what he had to say, I said I'd consider it, I took an answer in the Parliament today, I said we would match the commitment of the NSW government but we wanted to do it in a different way and I wanted to discuss that matter with him.

JEFFRIES:

At this stage now according to the AAP stories I've seen on it this afternoon, you are saying that his plan is not clear cut, but you don't have a clear cut plan either do you?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, the important thing I wanted to clear up is his allegation that we are not prepared to make any resources available and the second thing I'd say is that it will be two years before the main impact of the retrenchments in Newcastle is felt, and if we are sensible we will take a few weeks, talk to each other and work out the most intelligent and efficient way of spending the money that is going to be made available.

JEFFRIES:

Well, how much money will you make available?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, we have said we will match the \$10 million.

JEFFRIES:

Right, so you'll definitely make that \$10 million?

PRIME MINISTER:

I said that, I made that clear in the Parliament and Mr Carr has either been badly advised or he has deliberately misrepresented my position. Now, I understand the problem, it's not an easy thing and it shouldn't be something for a whole lot of wild political point scoring so we don't agree with the proposal that Mr Carr has. We believe in talking to each other we can develop a better way of doing it, I have eight available... my major projects facilitator to see if there are some major projects that could benefit the Hunter Valley, it will take a few weeks to work out the most intelligent way of spending the resources that are going to be made available but it shouldn't be something where Mr Carr and I try and score points off each other, that really is quite unintelligent and not something that the people of Newcastle would appreciate.

JEFFRIES:

Well of course several of Mr Carr's senior colleagues do have constituencies in that area so they are probably applying a bit of pressure.

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MAY 14 '97 14:06

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PRIME MINISTER:

But there is a Liberal Senator based in Newcastle - Senator Tierney, and Liberal Party holds a seat in the Hunter Valley, but it is not a question of whether they are Liberal or Labor Members, we are talking about the future of Australians and that's what I am interested in, and it can't be something that is just a knee-jerk political exercise. Mr Carr came to me with a proposal. Before he announced it, he didn't consult me before he announced it, he just wanted me to sign up with his proposal. I've had a look at his proposal, I don't think it is the most intelligent way to spend 25 or \$30 million. And what I've said is that we will match the NSW government but we want to do it in a different way, we want to talk to them about how it is done and we want to encourage BHP to put in more. Now, that is a sensible response and I reject completely Mr Carr's attempt to say that we are disinterested.

JEFFRIES:

Mr Howard, I do appreciate your time today, I do have the Premier on the line, so I'll get his response.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you.