

29 May 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LYNEHAM - NIGHTLINE**

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**LYNEHAM:**

Prime Minister, welcome again to Nightline.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

It's good to be here.

**LYNEHAM:**

Now your opponents say that you are not big-hearted enough to lead the nation towards true reconciliation between black and white. What do you say?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

That's mean-spirited and it's wrong and it's what you would expect from a political opponent. I am committed to reconciliation but on a proper basis and not a basis that is preoccupied with the past but rather a basis that is concerned about addressing disadvantage in the present and building a stronger, more co-operative future so I dismiss that as the typical criticism of political opponents.

**LYNEHAM:**

But you know it's widely said that your speech on Monday to the Reconciliation Convention could have, should have offered more leadership, more inspiration.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I made it very clear the depth of my personal feeling about past injustices and I think in doing so I spoke for most of Australian community. I strongly defended what I am trying to do with native title against some unfair criticism and you cannot have a proper dialogue between different sections of the Australian community unless we speak plainly and directly and frankly to each other.

**LYNEHAM:**

Wasn't it too much of a political speech, not enough reaching out?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, well Paul, I did a lot of reaching out in that speech but when claims were made in my presence that my ten point plan was blatantly lopsided and deliberately unfair, I naturally, on behalf of the Government must respond.

**LYNEHAM:**

You apologised personally but you didn't apologise as the leader of the nation, on behalf of the nation for say the stolen generation issue. Why not?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well there are a number of reasons. One of them is that a formal, unqualified apology does, according to legal advice that we have received have certain legal implications and those who study

this carefully, and I am sure there are many in the Labor Party who have done that, who know that what I am saying is true.

**LYNEHAM:**

So you have to perhaps then be liable for compensation which you don't want.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

The advice that I have received from a Government senior legal adviser is that an unqualified apology has significant legal implications and that is one of the reasons why the response to this report must be a considered response and we must, as the Report Chairman acknowledged, give ourselves time to respond in a measured way. I mean, there are many things in the recommendations which I am sure most people would very strongly support.

**LYNEHAM:**

It's a very shocking document.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

It is and I have read large parts of it. I have read many of the personal cases.

**LYNEHAM:**

Could you understand Kim Beazley's emotion yesterday?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look I never criticise anybody for displaying emotion. I never would so I make no criticism of him or indeed anybody else but can I say that we cannot get into a situation in this country where current generations accept responsibility for past misdeeds. I mean, where does it end? Will you get to a situation where, say children given in adoption might at some time in the future argue that their human rights were violated because their natural mothers had no right to agree? There has to be a point at which we resolve as a community to remedy past mistakes by building a better future. Surely that is the code by which a reconciled Australia ought to live.

**LYNEHAM:**

Wasn't the Governor General right when he said it's not a question of personal blame, it's a question really of national shame? If we feel pride about things like Gallipoli and the other defining moments of our nation, isn't it also fair to feel shame about things we did badly, that we got wrong?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I don't have any argument with that. I have got no quarrel with that.

**LYNEHAM:**

You talk about guilt a lot.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I do because I think there is an element of retribution in the approach of many people. There is a theme in the attitude of some which does have guilt and retribution. I have no difficulty at all in accepting that wrong things were done and they would have caused great pain to people but they were not done by the present generation.

**LYNEHAM:**

Some think you want to sweep that under the carpet and just see history through rose coloured glasses.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I mean, my critics always find a way of attacking me. I mean, that's to be expected. And I didn't expect a warm reception on Monday in Melbourne because many of the people in that audience are political, life-long enemies of mine and politically hostile to me.

**LYNEHAM:**

We seem so bitter now, so divided, much more so than '67 and there's talk now of a possible double dissolution on your 10 point Wik plan. Don't you fear the social consequences of say, an election based around that?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Paul, I've got to fix the native title mess, I can't leave it. I've got to fix it. I mean, you cannot leave the law in its present state. There is enormous uncertainty all around Australia. It's easy for people to say it's divisive, it's terrible. I'm in the chair. I've got to fix it. And however difficult it is, I'm determined to do so.

**LYNEHAM:**

On another issue of real national importance - your fearless prediction that Mark Taylor would do so well in Britain, I hope you didn't put too much money on him.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well you know my views on gambling Paul. But can I just say of Mark, I still have an enormous amount of faith in him, I really do...

**LYNEHAM:**

Even though he's forgotten how to bat?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, a lot of Captains have gone through difficulties like that in the past and they've triumphed and I, along with millions of other Australians are still hoping that it'll all come good.

**LYNEHAM:**

So if you were Chairman of selectors you'd keep him on the team?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes I would.

**LYNEHAM:**

Thanks for your time.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

It's a pleasure.