

26 June 1997

15

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER:  
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP  
RADIO INTERVIEW - ABC AM PROGRAMME**

**E & OE.....**

**CURTIS:**

One of the areas where Australia and Britain don't agree is on the issue of greenhouse gas emissions. Is there any way you can get Britain to move on this?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

We do have different views on this because Australian interests are different from British interests. We have a special case. We're a net exporter of energy and we're a highly developed country and if the current European and American proposals go through, it will damage Australia, cost Australian jobs, reduce our gross domestic product and I am certainly not going to associate Australia with that kind of arrangement. Mr Cook and I agreed that our officials would commence a dialogue to see if we could reach more common ground and I did have the opportunity of pointing out in some detail the basis of Australia's concerns and I will be pursuing those concerns with the Americans. There has been some shift within the United States, there were signs out of the Denver Conference that the Americans were not as accommodating to the British and the Europeans as the latter would have liked.

**CURTIS:**

Are you hopeful then that you can get President Clinton to move further or is there a chance that after your meeting with Mr Clinton you will still have two of Australia's closest friends, Britain and the United States, lined up against us?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well you've got to understand that even with close friends there are occasions when you have differences of opinion. The real value of a close relationship is that it can absorb difference of opinion. It's only the fragile relationships between nations that can't absorb differences but this is a simple question of Australia's national interest. It is not in our interest, it will damage our interest if we go along with what in particular the Europeans are arguing for and I will just continue to put Australia's case. I will take every opportunity and particularly the one now afforded by the agreement I've arrived at with Mr Cook, to continue to push our case, and if at the end of the day we are not successful in obtaining accommodation well, the arrangement will not be something that we can be part of.

**CURTIS:**

So you just simply won't sign any target or be part of any formal agreement?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I am not going to be part of an agreement that damages Australia, never.

**CURTIS:**

Given that you've issued such dire warnings about the adverse impact that these targets could have on Australia, would it have been more important, would it have been more beneficial to state your case at the earth summit?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No I don't. I actually think the sort of bilateral discussions I am having with senior people in the British Government and senior people in the American Government, and bear in mind, I raised the issue personally with Mr Hashimoto and the German Chancellor, Dr Kohl, when they were in Australia a little while ago. Those efforts are far more valuable.

**CURTIS:**

Another of the perceptions that you faced when you arrived in Britain is that Australia has a race problem, is a racist country. Do you believe that you've been able to tackle that perception?

**PRIME MINISTER::**

Yes, when that's come up I've dealt with it. I mean it was the most ridiculous proposition. The expression used was rampant racism. That rightly angers all Australians. We are a tolerant, open country and we can hold our head very high with the rest of the world and on a scale of ten, we are around nine compared with other nations. There are many that have deplorable records of racial prejudice and one of the things that I will always say emphatically as Prime Minister of my country is that we have a lot to be proud of in terms of toleration and openness and the idea that in some way there is deep-seated racism in Australia is wrong, it's offensive to the decency of Australians and that's a message that all Australian spokesmen and women ought to put out to the rest of the world.

**CURTIS:**

You've also talked on this trip about the republic. Of course it's been something of an issue with the British media over the last few years but you also just stressed the importance of the constitutional convention in your plans. Can you afford not to let that convention go ahead?

**PRIME MINISTER::**

Well I want it to go ahead. The only people who can stop the convention going ahead are the minor parties in the Labor Party and the Senate but our position is very simple on that. We promised to have a convention. We said it would be half appointed and half elected and that is exactly what we have proposed. We have even written already to the 36 people that we proposed to appoint to the convention. We are not going to have it eroded, we're not going to have it manipulated at the margin by the Labor Party and the minor parties in the Senate. I mean we are the Government. I don't say that arrogantly or with any form of conceit. We are the Government. We do have a substantial majority in the House of Representatives and the idea that the Opposition Parties can put and take in relation to something for which we obtained an explicit mandate is really quite ridiculous. We have kept faith with the Australian people. We promised a convention. We described how it would be composed. We have done that and because the Labor Party and others don't like the voting method we have chosen, we are expected to roll over and say, yes, of course we will change it.

We are the Government and we are just not going to be pushed around in that fashion.

**CURTIS:**

But isn't the voting system a question, as you say, at the margins, a question of process? Isn't it more important that the convention goes ahead? Why is the voting system so important?

**PRIME MINISTER::**

Well you might ask the Labor Party that. I mean, we did win the election, remember?

**CURTIS:**

Your trip was criticised for the time you were taking away. You are away during sittings of Parliament. There have been issues the Government has had to confront back in Australia, problems with work for the dole although that's now resolved, question about the constitutional convention and also continuing Opposition attacks on the Small Business Minister, Geoff Prosser. Was this the best time to be going away or would it have been better to wait until after Parliament had finished sitting?

**PRIME MINISTER::**

Well to some extent my travel plans were influenced by the availability of people I wanted to see and the idea that an Australian Prime Minister shouldn't visit the new British Prime Minister, a new Chancellor, a new Foreign Secretary, a new Opposition leader here, pay a courtesy call on the Queen, address the Confederation of British Industry, really carry out a comprehensive network of engagements, then go on

to the United States and see the President and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve and the Defence Secretary and the Acting Secretary of State and visit the biggest financial community in the world, namely New York and do all of that in the space of just over two weeks, the idea that that is not part of the job of an Australian Prime Minister, whether he or she is Labor or Liberal is really quite absurd and I think the criticism that has been levelled against me has been petty, has been selling the national interest short, and frankly and rightly so, has rebounded on those who've uttered the criticism.

**CURTIS:**

What issues do you want to raise with Bill Clinton and what would you like either him to tackle or Australia and the United States to tackle together?

**PRIME MINISTER:.**

I will obviously be talking about APEC, I will be talking about relations with China, the importance of maintaining the trade liberalisation process within APEC. I will certainly mention climate change, I will certainly mention the broader aspects of the American Australian relationship. We do have an enormous amount in common. We have a great history and we have a great future ahead of us.

**CURTIS:**

Despite the friendship with America, there will be some issues which you have nominated, where there is a difference of opinion. Greenhouse is one of them, China is another. Do you think you will hear any difference in the message from Bill Clinton on China?

**PRIME MINISTER:.**

I don't think there's any difference in our end objective. We are both concerned to have a constructive relationship with China. We both want China in the World Trade Organisation. We both recognise the growing strength and importance of China. We would both like to see measurable progress on human rights issues. It's a question of how you get there and the differences are not great. Okay, we have a difference about attendance at the swearing in of the new Legislative Council in Hong Kong. That of itself is not a huge thing. The Americans understand our position. We understand theirs. We each know where the other is coming from but the broader, more important thing is that both of us want China fully involved and we have already discussed that. We will no doubt discuss it again because it is very important that China be absorbed into the world community of nations because through that absorption it is more likely that the world will benefit and over time, some of the goals people want within China will be achieved.

**CURTIS:**

And finally, if I could just try and break through the London Convention for a moment, it's been said back in Australia that you were part of a decision to suspend an invitation to Yasser Arafat to visit Australia. Why was that decision taken?

**PRIME MINISTER:.**

The position in relation to Yasser Arafat is as outlined by Mr Fischer and that is that just at the present time it's not convenient but that doesn't mean to say that he won't visit Australia at some time in the future.

**CURTIS:**

Why isn't it convenient? Is it not convenient for Australia or for Mr Arafat himself?

**PRIME MINISTER:.**

I don't really want to add anything to what Mr Fischer and Mr Downer have said on it. I don't think it's sensible to get into the minutiae of these things when one is away.  
ends