



PRIME MINISTER

18 September 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW - LEADERS' RETREAT
AITUTAKI, COOK ISLANDS**

E&OE.....

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister Howard, do you feel that you're going to be coming under pressure at this retreat in terms of the CO2 reductions?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, not really. It's one of those issues where different countries have different perspectives and I am very confident that we will have a sensible outcome which accommodates the range of views which inevitably different countries bring to it.

JOURNALIST:

So it will essentially be a bland communiqué, will it?

PRIME MINISTER:

I'm not going to try and give pre-emptive descriptions to the communiqué. I am simply stating that I don't believe the differences are quite as likely to produce the difficulties that some people have forecast.

JOURNALIST:

Will Australia be on its own in that position?

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't think Australia is ever on its own in a generic sense. In this part of the world Australia has very close relations with the countries of the Pacific but you can never have an exact similarity of views on difficult issues. The nature of international discussion and discourse is to try and accommodate a range of views on difficult issues. That's why you have these gatherings otherwise there would be no point.

JOURNALIST:

It did emerge that Sir Geoffrey said in a speech yesterday, where he said that these economic reforms have to take into account the Pacific islands and the environment, culture in a human dimension. Is there scope for accommodating that inside the action plans that were agreed to in Cairns?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes. Economic reform, whether it occurs in the Pacific Island states or it occurs elsewhere must always take into account the history and the culture and the modalities of a society and that applies whether it's Australia, a European nation, North America or a Pacific island state. It's a perfectly logical, commonsense thing for a leader to say and I totally agree with him.

JOURNALIST:

Is there a risk though that they could fall back on that to slow down the pace of reform so that they're actually not keeping up with what they need to do?

PRIME MINISTER:

Look, I've come here to talk to my colleagues. I am not going to start reading lectures in advance of discussion.

JOURNALIST:

Has the AUSTEO document caused any concern at all?

PRIME MINISTER:

I beg your pardon?

JOURNALIST:

Has the leaked document, that was leaked in Cairns, going to cause any problems today, do you think?

PRIME MINISTER:

No.

JOURNALIST:

What is it that you would like to see the communique say, from the Australian point of view?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think I will first tell my colleagues that.

JOURNALIST:

Are you happy with the pace of economic reform here at the moment?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think that the Pacific island states have tried very hard and many of them have achieved a great deal of success in economic reform in difficult circumstances. The Cook Islands itself has gone through a very, I think, difficult period of economic adjustment and has done it very well.

Journalist:

Prime Minister Rabuka said yesterday that if there was going to be a problem with the CO2 emissions, he would expect that the states, or the nations who actually benefit economically, to help those who are suffering and he talked about Australia in that. How do you feel about that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Look, I have said all I am going to say about that. Don't ask the same question 15 different ways.

JOURNALIST:

Where do you see Australia fitting into this? You're a regional superpower compared to

these minor players in the Pacific. What role do you have when you start talking about economic reform?

PRIME MINISTER:

The first role you have is the role of courtesy and that is to discuss the issues of mutual interest and concern with one's colleagues which I am, that's the reason why I am here.

Thank you.

[Ends]