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PRIME MINISTER

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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
PRESS CONFERENCE
THE BALMORAL HOTEL, EDINBURGH**

E & OE.....

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. The Heads of Government meeting today dealt with economic, including environmental matters. The outcome as expressed in the communique is extremely satisfactory to Australia. It is expressed in language which fully meets the goals that I set out to achieve.

There is, for example an explicit recognition of the importance of differentiation. The paragraph on environment reads, inter alia the costs of protecting it, meaning the environment, should be borne in accordance with shared and differentiated responsibilities. There are no attempts in the communique to set out targets. There is a recognition of the need for differentiation and there is also, very importantly, an acknowledgment that all countries should play their part within the Berlin mandate and naturally a recognition that developed countries should pursue outcomes that would produce reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

So in every respect I regard the outcome as being very satisfactory indeed. It's an outcome that I can fully endorse. It's consistent with the line that I've argued for. I believe over recent months there has been a gradual recognition of the justice and the common sense of the case that Australia has put. We remain strongly committed as a nation to playing our part. We will play our part. When the details of the new measures are announced the world will know that Australia is a willing player in the process of contributing to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions but we have never been willing to accept the disproportionate share of the burden, and I regard the communique that has been issued advising Commonwealth leaders that in relation to that issue as being fully in accord and fully consistent with the goals that I've set out to achieve.

In other respects, the conference today dealt with matters of trade. There is a very strong support as expressed in the communique, for further progress towards liberalisation of world trade. There are obviously different vantage points given the variety of nations within the Commonwealth but there is a, I think, majority view that further liberalisation is desirable but understandably some of the less developed countries seek reassurance and ask questions about the value and the benefits of further liberalisation.

One of the reasons that Australia proposed and has funded, and has now drawn support from the Canadians and the New Zealanders and I understand also the British, a special facility to provide technical assistance and advice to the very small countries of the Commonwealth about how they might enjoy the benefits of trade liberalisation.

Could I just finally say in these introductory remarks that the Conference, which is of course the first CHOGM that I've attended, has been a marvellous opportunity for me to personally get to know many of the Commonwealth's leaders on a much better basis.

I have, of course, previously met Mr Blair and Mr Chretien, and the New Zealand Prime Minister. A number of the other leaders, particularly from the Indian sub-continent I'd not previously met and they do share a lot in common with Australia, in history, aspects of culture, the law and of course the Commonwealth association which draws all of those things together. And one of the enormous values of this Conference is that it does enable one to develop those bilateral associations and it means that if difficulties or opportunities arise in the future, the personal contact is so much easier as a consequence.

I think Mr Blair has done a first class job in chairing the meeting and I've found dealing with him to be very easy. We've worked together in concert on a number of matters and he's seeking to do the best in leading his country and defending his country's interests and that is, of course, exactly what I've done, particularly in relation to greenhouse matters and I've regarded as I said at the beginning of my remarks, I regard it as a very satisfactory outcome.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, we were told in the briefing today there was a suggestion that the Commonwealth might adopt an action plan to report back to CHOGM every two years on greenhouse gas reduction ... (inaudible) be required to make a certain effort.. Did the Commonwealth adopt that?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think you'll get the answer to that when you have a look at the communique.

JOURNALIST:

Well, if so, how specific is it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I think you'll find it's not too specific.

JOURNALIST:

So, will the Commonwealth be taking any sort of position to the Kyoto Conference. There's also some suggestion of that.

PRIME MINISTER:

No, you won't have a combined Commonwealth position at the Kyoto conference, no. I mean that's just not realistic because different Commonwealth countries have different positions. But what is important is that the much heralded clash, the much heralded stand-off, the much written and reported-about isolation didn't happen.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think you'll have the same success at Kyoto?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I think you have to look at what the Americans are saying and doing. Have a look at the movement of opinion in certain circles at least within Canada, have a look at the different attitudes within the United States and you will get your answer. I will, my Government will go to Kyoto armed with the measures that we will put down, armed with the logic and persuasive power of the case that we are putting, but also being a country that wants to play a very constructive role.

All I ask is that what comes out of Kyoto is balanced and fair. I don't want a free ride out of Kyoto, I've never asked for that. And I have to emphasise that to you, that I've never said that I don't want Australia to be part of the process or to make a contribution. I have just never been willing to accept the 15% demanded by the European Union. And, there is really, the signs are very strongly that the Americans, well, the Americans rejected it. And there is growing evidence to me that the tide has really begun to turn in a big way on this issue.

JOURNALIST:

Could Australia accept the America position, Mr Howard as a general position?

PRIME MINISTER:

Michelle, I've said before that we will announce closer to Kyoto and probably in advance of my attendance at the APEC meeting in a few weeks' time, our more closely defined position and until then I'm not going to speculate. But you can take it for granted that there'll be no resiling, in fact there'll be a reaffirmation of our rejection of the European Union's position.

JOURNALIST:

Will that more closely defined position include specific measures you intend to implement to reduce greenhouse emissions in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh, yes, I certainly will be doing that, yes.

JOURNALIST:

How much of a victory do you think this outcome has been for Australia's advancing in particular?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, a sensible outcome is a sensible outcome. And I'm not given to making extravagant claims. But I just invite you to have a look at the communique when you see it and I invite you to compare that with some of the predictions that were made about the difficulties that we would face.

Now, I'm interested in a victory for the environment. I'm interested in a victory for common sense and a fair sharing of burdens. I'm not interested in trumpeting any kind of national outcome, but I am always willing, above everything else, to defend the national interest and everything I've done on this issue has been in pursuit of Australia's national interest and nothing else. And I think Australia's national interest includes fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

JOURNALIST:

But the outcome of the Communique, Mr Howard, was different from what is likely to happen a few days ago.

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh yes, oh yes. There is no doubt about that.

JOURNALIST:

What contributed to the change in the outcome? Is it your diplomatic genius, or was it (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Laura, you know, differentiation in our time.

JOURNALIST:

To what extent was it a result of your working to get Mr Blair on the greenhouse and on the trade issues?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think the British Prime Minister and I, although we had different vantage points on this issue, worked together in a very constructive way.

JOURNALIST:

What the small island states, for example, Nauru, Kiribas, a number of them have been very critical of the Australian position. What's your message?

PRIME MINISTER:

I understand their position and when you look at the totality of what we intend to do and what we will be arguing for at Kyoto, you, meaning the small island states, will understand that we're being fair and reasonable. I understand how they feel. For many of them it is a matter of survival and I have no desire to behave in any way that's insensitive towards them and one of the things I have argued for very strongly is that you're not going to get a permanent and effective response to this issue unless you get everybody involved, and what is very good about the language of this communique is the point that says, underline the importance of the successful outcome at Kyoto, with all countries playing their part within the Berlin mandate, and then it goes on to say, would develop countries doing something serious about reducing their greenhouse gas emissions.

Now, that is something I argued for at the Pacific Forum at Raratonga and I don't deny for a moment that we have got to do a lot more as a country. We have to do more but we're not going to cop an unfair share of the burden and I think there has been a growing international acceptance that we are arguing a fair case in doing that.

JOURNALIST:

What place does the statement have given that there aren't many industrialised nations and that highly industrialised nations (inaudible). The Commonwealth doesn't have a seat at Kyoto and the major industrial nations just aren't represented by that (inaudible).

PRIME MINISTER:

I think the British might be offended at a suggestion they're not a major industrialised nation and the British Prime Minister, of course, will be the Chairman of the European Union for six months, commencing on the first of January next year. It carries the weight that any statement agreed to by, what, 45 - 50 nation carries, and that's significant weight. I mean, the Commonwealth does represent a quarter of the world's population. It does represent highly industrialised countries as well as small island states as well as the second-most populist nation in the world and the countries in the

Mediterranean - I mean, I don't want to give you a sort of an atlas outline, but you all know, you remember it all...

JOURNALIST:

~~Prime Minister~~, just to return to Neville Chamberlain. It emphasised the importance of personal contact in pursuit of the national interest. If what you say is so important, shouldn't you go to Kyoto?

PRIME MINISTER:

The personal contact there will be the personal contact of Robert Hill as the Environment Minister has painstakingly built up with his counterparts.

JOURNALIST:

With respect to Robert Hill, I'm talking about (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, he carries a lot of clout. It is not, as I understand it, it is not a meeting which is being attended by any heads of Government, apart from the Chairman. I think he will be there at various stages. That is Japan which is hosting it. That's my understanding. Obviously, if it turned into a forum where a large number of heads of government were going I would, but as things stand at the present time, that is not the intention. As you will understand, I am not looking for more overseas travel. I don't embrace it quite as warmly as some of my predecessors.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard, to go back to an earlier answer which you didn't quite answer, are you hopeful of a good outcome at Kyoto for Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

Michelle, I never make extravagant claims in advance of meetings.

JOURNALIST:

Hopeful, I said.

PRIME MINISTER:

Hopeful is capable of being equated to something else and look, I am growing more confident that the commonsense and justice of the Australian position is being more widely recognised. We're certainly in a stronger position now, and there's greater respect and understanding for the Australian position now than was the case some weeks ago and I believe that will gather momentum as we get closer to Kyoto but I don't want to put it any more strongly than that.

I mean, at the end of the day we will put our case and if it wins understanding and acceptance, well that's terrific. If it doesn't, well so be it but I am a lot more optimistic now than I was a month or two ago.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible) To what extent though were you in accord on this matter, which is slightly different?

PRIME MINISTER:

In accord. Well his position as part of the European Union is different from my position but that doesn't mean to say you can't work together constructively. I mean, the important thing is that it has now been accepted that you're not going to get an outcome, a satisfactory outcome unless there is acceptance by everyone that different countries have different situations and therefore there must be acceptance of differential burdens. And the other advance in this document is that we have got the nations of the commonwealth saying that everybody has got to be involved in some way.

Now obviously, the involvement is going to differ from country to country. Now this is a point I have argued for a long time. I just have to say again that there is absolutely nothing in the environment for a regime being imposed upon a heavily industrialised country which means that a dirty industry leaves that country and goes to another country that has no regime at all, in fact an even less vigorous regime. The net impact on the environment is not changed in that circumstance.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister Howard, you might have palled up with Mr Blair on this communique, but obviously when you get to Kyoto, or when your representative gets to Kyoto, they're going to be on different sides of the fence. Do you concede that it's going to be a lot more difficult to get the sort of result you're looking for at Kyoto?

PRIME MINISTER:

A lot more difficult? It's looking less difficult than it was two months ago.

JOURNALIST:

But Mr Blair's not going to change his mind, is he?

PRIME MINISTER:

But that is not the point because there are a lot of other powerful players who don't have the view that the European Union has. That's the point. I mean, the Americans

have explicitly rejected the view of the European Union. The Japanese have rejected the view of the European Union and that is not really the point.

JOURNALIST:

~~Prime Minister, earlier today Nelson Mandela told us that if he were asked he would assist in reconciling Aboriginal communities and your Government over difficulties on Wik legislation. Is there a role for Nelson Mandela to mediate in these difficulties?~~

PRIME MINISTER:

I think he also said at that same news conference that he was confident that the matter would be satisfactorily resolved. I wouldn't have thought there was a role for any head of state in relation to the resolution of a domestic issue in Australia, no matter what the issue is.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, what are we to make of Tony Blair in fact signing up to this agreement? Do you take it as a sign that Britain may try to shift the European Union position in Kyoto?

PRIME MINISTER:

I wouldn't try and talk for the British.

JOURNALIST:

But I mean the British (inaudible) mandatory targets, and now they're talking about differentiation.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I wouldn't try and talk for the British, it's not sensible, it would be presumptuous of me. If you want to know the British position, go to another briefing that they give and they will outline it. But look, I don't make that claim at all. I am very measured in the claims I make about these things and it's silly to be otherwise.

JOURNALIST:

Well why did Tony Blair sign up if he doesn't agree with you on the issue or with many other Commonwealth countries?

PRIME MINISTER:

But that's a different matter, Stephanie. What has been expressed in this document is a recognition that different countries have different situations and secondly, that to get a workable solution you need in some way to involve all countries. Now that is all that

I've been arguing for. Mr Blair still has a position in relation to his own country as I have in relation to mine and we'll each continue to put it, but the important thing is that there has been an acceptance by the Commonwealth countries that different countries have different situations. Now that is a huge advance in my view and a very important advance.

JOURNALIST:

In other words Prime Minister, the document has no binding effect on the members of the Commonwealth if the Commonwealth countries can go along on their own independent (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, let me answer that by saying that if this document had contained a call for binding targets, I think a lot of people would have been running around saying that this creates an enormous problem for Australia. So let's not mince words, you can't in the one breath say that binding targets and everything is something that would be embarrassing for Australia, given the position that I've taken, and when you come out with a document that doesn't have them, say it doesn't mean anything.

I mean, of course at the end of the day each country who is a member of the Commonwealth is free to argue its own position at Kyoto, but significantly, at this meeting there has been a recognition of some of the things that Australia has been arguing for.

Now I don't put it more strongly than that, but equally I don't put it any less strongly than that, because it does represent a significantly better outcome than was predicted by many for Australia, and it represents a commonsense appreciation by the countries of the Commonwealth to involve everyone if we're to have a lasting solution. But I don't want to make any extravagant claims about what Mr Blair's position on this issue as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom will be at Kyoto, or his position as Chairman of the European Union, that's a matter for him to answer for. But when you read the words of this document you will see that what I've said is a fair reflection of the position.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard before you came here had you had any indications that the outcome may be this, or was it all done here?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, most of it of course was done here. Mr Blair and I had a discussion in Downing Street. There had been some contact between our officials in advance and certainly, let me speak for my part, the Australian officials have done great work for the Australian Government and for the national interest on this, I thank them for it. They've been very effective over a period of time in going around the world traps on the subject, working on it, and I appreciate it very much. But there was obviously quite a bit of work done here.

JOURNALIST:

Just to return to the Mandela question, do you appreciate his offer to help, or do you regard it as impertinent?

PRIME MINISTER:

I certainly didn't think he was behaving impertinently, and I'm not sure on the briefing that I was given that he saw a need to make an offer. I thought he was talking generically and I understand that. I certainly don't regard Nelson Mandela as having behaved impertinently, not at all. I think he's behaved impeccably and he is an extraordinarily impressive man. And he's one of the significant figures of our age, and it was a great delight for the first time to meet him.

JOURNALIST:

Was this discussed at all between you and Mr Mandela?

PRIME MINISTER:

No.

JOURNALIST:

Any concrete outcomes on trade?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I think the most concrete outcome was the general endorsement of trade liberalisation.

[ENDS]