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PRIME MINISTER

25 October 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW
COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING
RETREAT AT ST ANDREWS**

E&OE.....

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, how did your talks go this morning?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, they were very very good. We talked about Nigeria and also talked about conditions under which new members should be admitted to the Commonwealth. I had a very interesting lunch with a number of colleagues including President Mandela and he has been kind enough to extend an invitation for me to visit South Africa which I'd like to take up. He's obviously one of the very significant figures at these meetings, given what he's been through and what he represents and I look forward to taking up that invitation.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible) ... resolution of the Nigerian question?

PRIME MINISTER:

Basically as is, that Nigeria has to conform with the principles in order to absolve itself of the suspension that was imposed at the CHOGM meeting in New Zealand and that's an attitude that everybody agrees with very strongly.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, you've had 24 hours to assess the reaction to the question of greenhouse gases and the resolution here. Are you now a bit more confident perhaps of a good resolution from your point of view at Kyoto?

PRIME MINISTER:

I've always been confident that, if we kept putting our case, there'd be greater international recognition and that really is what has happened. I don't make extravagant claims in these matters. I'm always very measured and careful, but there's no doubt there's a far greater recognition of the Australian position now than a few months ago and that's terrific.

JOURNALIST:

And does that include the Americans? Do you think they'd be prepared to come on board for differentiation?

PRIME MINISTER:

The Americans' position is very encouraging. The Americans have rejected the European position. The Americans believe very strongly, as we do, that you have to get the developing countries at least involved in the dialogue and you've now got a position where the Europeans are saying this, the Japanese are saying this, and the Americans are saying this, and we're saying something else. I think what you've got is a situation where, if the goal of action is to be achieved, then you have to allow for differences of opinion between different countries.

JOURNALIST:

How supportive will the fact that CHOGM is now mentioning differentiation be at Kyoto?

PRIME MINISTER:

Very good, Matt, because what it does is to represent the expression of views of a whole variety of countries, big countries, industrialised countries, developing countries with big populations.....

JOURNALIST:

Like India?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, very small countries with small populations. It's encouraging. I don't want to overstate it. I never do in these things but certainly all of the talk about stand-offs and this and that hasn't materialised.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think the fact that the Europeans, the Germans for example, have been quite hostile to President Clinton's announcement of the last week may have the effect of helping Australia's cause too?

PRIME MINISTER:

It wasn't very clever of them being so hostile to the Americans.

JOURNALIST:

What about President Mandela? Did you discuss the Wik offer that he made?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, that didn't come up.

JOURNALIST:

Mrs Howard, how are you finding the trip so far?

MRS HOWARD:

Oh, it's been very interesting. It really has. I think the most important thing has been to meet the other leaders and to develop a personal relationship with some of them. It doesn't really quite matter where you are when you're doing it, except it's very nice to be in Edinburgh. I haven't been here before.

PRIME MINISTER:

She's got a bit of Scottish blood in her veins.

MRS HOWARD:

It's a very interesting city.

JOURNALIST:

And what have you both been doing today?

PRIME MINISTER:

What do you mean? (laughter) (inaudible) as well as posing for photographs for you blokes and I've been working and she's been working.

JOURNALIST:

And tennis?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, no, we've just finished lunch and then we were sort of organised for a walk and then I'm going to have another one or two more bilaterals.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, you've agreed to go to South Africa ..

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I've received the invitation and I'd like to take it up. I haven't exactly worked out when.

JOURNALIST:

When do you think you'll get the chance to go to India which is another?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I've been invited to go there. You accumulate a number of invitations at gatherings like this. I'd like to go to the Indian sub continent.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think you'll get to go there before the election?

PRIME MINISTER:

Whose election?

JOURNALIST:

Our next federal election.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I expect so. I can't be certain. You get invitations to a lot of countries and one would like to visit a lot of countries and one has also got a lot of work to do at home. We've got a lot of goals to achieve at home. A lot of things to get done like taxation reform which is so very important. Further waterproofing the Australian economy against the vagaries of regional turmoil.

JOURNALIST:

Part of that domestic agenda of course is aged care. Do you think we'll see changes to the aged care package?

PRIME MINISTER:

Fine tuning Glenn, fine tuning.

JOURNALIST:

When you talk about fine tuning Prime Minister, won't that have an impact on the budget outcome?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I suppose anything that fine tunes has some impact but it's a question of whether it's a fine impact or a big impact but it will be fine tuning but the principles of the policy are going to remain because the principle is very sound and that is that where people can afford to make a contribution to their own care, they should. They should be asked to do so. That's part of the principle of mutual obligation. We're not asking people who can't afford to do so to contribute to their care. We'll look after them. We'll provide a helping hand to people who don't have the resources to care for themselves in their old age. And people who do have the resources, there's nothing wrong, and I don't for a moment retreat from saying, if you can afford to make a contribution to your care, it is only reasonable that you do so, not ask the general body of taxpayers to pick up the bill. There's nothing wrong or un-Australian or unfair about that. It's a perfectly sound principle.

JOURNALIST:

Is it possible that, among the changes would be, at least for the time being, a deferral of the increase in the daily fee?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh no speculation about the details at the moment. Fine tuning at the principle thrust of the policy remains.

[ENDS]