

PRIME MINISTER

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E & O E – PROOF ONLY

Subjects: Australia Day; Tony Hodges; National Emergency Medal

PM: Thank you all very much for coming out on what is a hot Melbourne afternoon.

I want to take this opportunity to make some statements about events at The Lobby Restaurant on Australia Day and the subsequent resignation of one of my press secretaries Mr Tony Hodges.

To take you through the events of Australia Day firstly, Mr Tony Hodges as one of my press secretaries was in attendance at The Lobby Restaurant prior to my arrival for the event where I presented National Emergency Medals. Three other members of staff were also in attendance prior to my arrival doing various duties associated with the event.

Journalists were waiting there, as is to be expected for an event where I was to be in attendance, medals were to be presented and the Leader of the Opposition was to be in attendance as well.

Mr Hodges spoke to the journalists there; Mr Hodges was advised by the journalists there that Mr Abbott that morning had made a statement in relation to the tent embassy in Canberra and that Mr Abbott in relation to the tent embassy had suggested that people should move on.

Mr Hodges, having received this information from journalists waiting at The Lobby Restaurant, formed the view that these comments should be responded to.

Mr Hodges then contacted the office of Mr Chris Bourke. Mr Chris Bourke is the ACT Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mr Bourke is himself an indigenous Australian.

Mr Hodges was advised that Mr Bourke was unavailable for making media comment. Mr Hodges was then referred to Ms Kim Sattler of UnionsACT.

Mr Hodges spoke to Ms Sattler by telephone. Ms Sattler was in attendance at the 40th anniversary events for the tent embassy. Mr Hodges accurately conveyed to her the statement made by Mr Abbott.

At no point did Mr Hodges say to Ms Sattler that Mr Abbott had suggested that the tent embassy be torn down or removed in any way. Mr Hodges suggested to Ms Sattler that it may be appropriate for Ms Sattler to arrange for a couple of indigenous

Australians who were spokespeople to be in attendance at The Lobby Restaurant for the purpose of responding in the media to Mr Abbott's remarks, especially if Mr Abbott determined to hold a press conference associated with the event.

Mr Hodges, in taking these actions, acted alone and his actions were not authorised. Clearly they are viewed by me as unacceptable.

The events at The Lobby Restaurant then ensued, as everybody is aware from the extensive coverage to date.

Mr Hodges subsequently to these events on Australia Day informed his superiors, specifically my senior press secretary and my communications director about this telephone call.

During the course of Friday morning quite a number of allegations were being bandied around in the media and by journalists about the events of the day.

My office, including my senior press secretary and communications director, worked to establish all of the facts in relation to these allegations. I, at the time, was presenting more National Emergency Medals at Flowerdale.

When I returned to this office, the Melbourne office, from Flowerdale in country Victoria, I was then briefed by my senior staff in relation to the outcomes of their investigations. Having received that factual brief I then met with Mr Hodges.

Mr Hodges had already offered his resignation to my chief of staff. He offered his resignation to me and I accepted it, because Mr Hodges conduct was unauthorised and it was unacceptable. He made a grave error of judgement.

However I do want to say in relation to Mr Hodges, that he is a hardworking person, he is a decent person. He recognises that he has made an error of judgement and he has paid a very big price in relation to that error of judgement.

On the events in general, I want to say this: no one's angrier than me about what happened on Australia Day. I had fought to institute this National Emergency Medal. I'd done that because I had met around this country people who had done remarkable things during the course of natural disasters, who deserved our recognition.

And when the protest kicked off and people were starting to smash on the glass, things happened like the man I was pinning a medal on his chest at that time subsequently came to me after the formalities had concluded and basically asked if I could re-enact it because his wife wasn't able to get the shot because of all of the disturbances.

Well that said something to me; it said something to me about the disruption of this event and what should have been an incredible moment of pride for each of those people as the medals were pinned on their chest.

They shouldn't have been in a circumstance where instead of all eyes being on them, all eyes were on protesters and on people pounding on glass.

So, no one is angrier than me about what happened at The Lobby Restaurant on Australia Day. The people who initiated those violent acts, the people who were involved in those violent acts are responsible for the violence that was there.

Their conduct has made me very angry; it's understandably made people around the nation very angry indeed.

I'm very happy to take questions. Yes.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, why did your office wait until after 6:30 to detail Mr Hodges involvement?

PM: Because it took some time to put the facts together here and in order to brief me.

Let's be very clear about this, there were a range of allegations flying around on Friday morning and each and every one of them was investigated by my senior staff and I was presented with all of the facts.

To take just one example – the allegation made on Sydney radio was that someone had directly contacted the tent embassy. That needed to be investigated, that was untrue. Journalists in Canberra were saying a woman from my office had contacted the tent embassy, obviously enquiries needed to be made of relevant female staff members.

So in those circumstances we were investigating a wide range of allegations and that took some time.

JOURNALIST: Was it a matter of trying to avoid the evening news?

PM: It was a matter of taking the time to get the investigations done so I was in command of the facts and once in command of the facts I could take the appropriate actions.

I obviously determined the appropriate action was to accept Mr Hodges resignation when he offered it. What he did was unauthorised, it was unacceptable and he's paid the price.

Yes.

JOURNALIST: What was the reason you denied any knowledge though yesterday?

PM: Well I didn't have any at the time. Yes.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, do you know Kim Sattler personally (inaudible)

PM: I don't know her personally, no.

Look I attend a wide range of events. I particularly attend a wide range of events in the ACT, so it's very, very likely she's been at events that I've been in attendance at, but I don't know her personally.

I'll answer everybody's questions, so there'll be plenty of time, so we can do them one at a time.

Yes.

JOURNALIST: You've described Mr Hodges actions as unauthorised and unacceptable, but is it your belief that those actions did incite that behaviour by that group that besieged you?

PM: Well the only people who can answer the question about what motivated them to engage in that violent conduct is the people who are involved in the violence.

Mr Hodges role is exactly as I have described it to you – he spoke to Ms Kim Sattler, he at no time misrepresented Mr Abbott's comments and he at no time suggested that there should be violence or demonstrations or protests about the comments.

What he suggested was that they should be responded to in the media and that a couple of spokespeople should be available for that purpose.

JOURNALIST: That in itself is not heinous is it?

PM: Well, I've obviously formed the view this was a grave error of judgement by Mr Hodges.

It was a grave error of judgement because Australia Day is a day on which we take, in my view particularly as Prime Minister, a bipartisan approach to celebrating our national day.

It was a grave error of judgement because Mr Hodges acted alone and took that approach at an event which should have been truly bipartisan and only ever focussed on one thing and that was the recognition of the very special Australians who were there to get a medal pinned on their chest.

And can I just put this in some context – I'm up and down on stages all the time, I speak publicly all the time, I get applause when I give speeches, that kind of thing, not always applause, but I'm in the public eye. For people who aren't in the public eye, for people who are getting a medal, that's a major lifetime event. It's something you want to get the photo of, it's something you want in the album that you're going to hand down to your kids, it's something that will take pride of place along with the wedding photos and the christening photos and the birthdays and the Christmases.

To have that event disrupted really made me furious and obviously I was very angry and disappointed when I learned that Mr Hodges had engaged in this conduct, which was unauthorised and unacceptable, but I want people to understand the facts of it

too. Mr Hodges did not misrepresent Mr Abbott's remarks; Mr Hodges did not incite violence or a demonstration.

Yes. I'll come to you at the back, because you're missed out so far, but I'll go here first. Yes.

JOURNALIST: How has he described his motivations to make those calls to you?

PM: Exactly as I've described it to you. He believed it was appropriate for someone to respond in the media to Mr Abbott's remarks.

Yes, at the back.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what's your response to the opposition's calls for a police (inaudible)

PM: Well I've already talked today about some things that have made me very angry, let me add one more to the list and that is the insinuations made today by Mr Abbott and Mr Pyne. They have made me very angry.

For it to be insinuated that I would play some role in disrupting an event to recognise Australians who had performed miracles during a natural disaster is deeply offensive. And it is absolutely typical of Mr Abbott's negativity and his tendency to go too far.

Yes.

JOURNALIST: Do you categorically deny, Prime Minister, that anybody else from your office was involved.

PM: Yes.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, (inaudible)

PM: That's a matter for the AFP.

JOURNALIST: Looking back at it, it seems that that was quite an undignified way for the Prime Minister to make an exit from this event, when (inaudible), but how do you feel about the image that that conveys?

PM: Well you weren't there, the police were and they formed their best judgement in the circumstances at the time. I thought they did an amazing job.

JOURNALIST: Ms Gillard, what's your response also to the Australian flag being burned yesterday (inaudible)

PM: It's grossly unacceptable conduct.

JOURNALIST: I also wasn't there, but I – like almost every Australian – have seen the footage, the photographs and the news footage. Were you hurt physically?

PM: Look, I scraped my foot because I didn't have my shoe on any longer, but not anything worth reporting or writing home about.

I've had worse blisters on my feet from wearing high heels for an evening, so we've got to keep all of this in some form of context. I think-

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Oh, look, clearly we were in a circumstance where we were in a glassed in restaurant, where I am pinning medals on people's chests, where there is a limited protest, some individuals to the left and the police moved to contain that.

I had no idea who they were or what they were there for or what an earth they would be protesting about at a National Emergency Medal presentation.

So there was a small sort of incident to my left as I went about putting the medals on people's chests.

I had spoken at the event, Mr Abbott had spoken at the event, it was a bipartisan event, the first time we'd ever presented these medals.

So small scuffle, no idea what it was about and then the formal event of putting the medals on finishes, we're having a cup of tea and talking and just more and more people are gathering around the glass, banging on glass and getting louder and louder and the police obviously formed the view that there was some risk that the glass wouldn't hold and I'd invite people to imagine what that would have looked like if there as glass everywhere in a room full of people and so they formed the view it was best to move me.

I ensured that Mr Abbott's safety was appropriately dealt with as well and we exited to the car in accordance with the directions of the police.

And I reiterate again, when you're not there and with 20/20 hindsight and lots of time to reflect, maybe people will form all sorts of views, but in the moment I think the police did an amazing job.

JOURNALIST: Just to clarify Prime Minister, when were you told of Mr Hodges involvement and by who?

PM: Yesterday, exactly as I have described to you.

I went to Flowerdale, I presented National Emergency Medals, I spoke to the media, there was a question about one of these allegations, I responded to that as you've seen. I then came back here from Flowerdale to my Melbourne office, during the afternoon I was fully briefed by my staff who had been involved in these investigations and then I spoke to Mr Hodges.

JOURNALIST: So late in the afternoon?

PM: Yes.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, have you or anyone from your spoken to Ms Sattler about these events?

PM: Yes, there has been communication with Ms Sattler about these events. I have named her today. Given I have named here I anticipate that there will be media interest in her, might have that wrong, but I suspect you will probably show some interest in her and consequently I thought she had a right to know.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, how did Mr Abbott react in the car (inaudible)

PM: Oh, look, I've got no comments about his reactions.

We were all fine, we were sitting in the backseat of the car – me, a Federal Police officer and Mr Abbott and we were reflecting on the events that had got us there. We were both very sure that the police had done a good job.

The car took me to the Lodge, I invited Mr Abbott into the Lodge if he wanted a drink of water or anything, he said he would prefer if the car took him to Parliament House so he could ascertain where his staff members were.

I then went into the Lodge and spent some time ascertaining where my staff members were, because we had been got out of the event, but our staff members were still in the middle of it and I also wanted to make sure that the people who were there for the event were all fine and Kate Lundy was there, Robert McClelland was there, the National Emergency Medal recipients were there, their families were there. So I spent some time just ascertaining everybody was OK.

Then I had the opportunity that evening at my regular Australia Day function at the Lodge to see the National Emergency Medal recipients and to hear from them, their stories of how they felt which is why, for example, I'm able to refer to the feelings of a number of them. They were very proud that they got the medal, but that wasn't the way, that wasn't the way.

JOURNALIST: Sorry, what's your view of Ms Sattler's involvement (inaudible)

PM: Oh well, look, it is exactly as I've described it to you. I'm not intending to express an attitude towards it.

OK. Thank you.

[ENDS]