

Prime Minister of Australia | *John Howard*

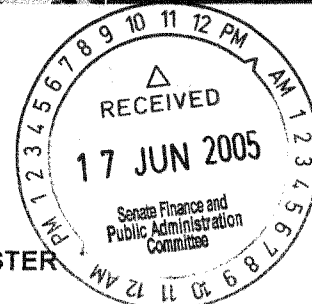
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Interviews

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP PRESS CONFERENCE, ISTANBUL, TURKEY

Subject: Meeting with Prime Minister of Turkey Mr Erdogan, Joint study on Anzac Cove, crowd behaviour at Gallipoli roadworks, entertainment.

E&OE.....

PRIME MINISTER:

Well ladies and gentlemen, I've just had a very enjoyable and productive meeting and lunch with the Prime Minister of Turkey, Mr Erdogan. Out of that meeting I can announce a number of things. In relation to the Anzac site on Gallipoli we have agreed that there will be two joint studies. One of them is of a technical and engineering kind - it'll be a joint study - it will include engineers and other relevant people from both Australia and Turkey. I've offered an Australian financial contribution towards the cost of this joint study and the other joint study that I'm going to mention. That joint engineering study will inform further discussions between Australia and Turkey regarding the retaining wall that was the subject of representations that I made to the Turkish Government through our Ambassador a few days ago and there won't be any further action taken on that issue until we have the benefit of the joint study.

We've also agreed to have a joint historical study which will include archaeological aspects concerning the site. This is a very positive outcome from the discussion. It is what I asked for and I want to record my gratitude to the Prime Minister of Turkey for his continued understanding and sympathetic approach. I recognised in relation to the question of symbolic recognition of the Anzac site that nothing could occur in relation to that which in any way detracted from Turkish sovereignty and as I think you are aware there are concerns on the Turkish side that the bald listing of the site on the national heritage list in Australia might well be seen, whether or not in reality it did, to detract from Turkish sovereignty.

We both see the Anzac site as not unimportant, indeed sacred in terms that are, in some respects commonly but in other respects differently understood in Australia and there is a very strong desire on the part of both Governments and both Prime Ministers to make certain that there is continued access to the site, that any changes that are made in the name of security and safety and comfort are as consistent as possible with the historic significance. I think it's fair to say that some people would want to treat the site just as a tourist attraction, others would want to treat it in a way that made it difficult for people to visit it and a

balance has got to be struck between the two and I think that would certainly be the overwhelming view of the people that have visited the site.

On non-Anzac Cove or Gallipoli related matters we had an extensive discussion about the bilateral economic relationship and we both committed to accelerate completion of the double taxation negotiations. We have agreed to explore a work and holiday visa arrangement to facilitate travel by young people between the two countries. I informed the Prime Minister and I can announce that Australia will endow 10 scholarships to facilitate exchanges, five from each country, for university level study. Two of these scholarships, one on the Turkish side and one on the Australian side, will encourage a particular focus on matters relating to the engagement of 1915 on Gallipoli peninsula.

I expressed my support for Turkish acceptance into the European Union, that of course is a matter to be resolved by the negotiating parties but it's very important to Turkey. We had a lengthy discussion on the current situation in the Middle East and most specifically Iraq, of course, whose border joins Turkey and both of us are very keen to see the establishment of a complete Iraqi Government. The Prime Minister expressed very strong support for the entrenching of democracy in Iraq and he agreed with me that the aim of the international community should be to deliver a democratic future to the people of Iraq.

And finally we had a lengthy discussion about terrorism and the importance that the leadership of countries such as Turkey give to the fight against terrorism in terms of the example that it sets. And we also talked about others of mutual interest, rather issues of mutual interest to our two countries including the significant number of Australians of Turkish descent and some discussion about a game that he has a great passion for – we call it soccer, he calls it football. We talked about the progress of that game in Australia. And finally I invited him to visit Australia and I have every reason to believe he'll be able to do so at a mutually convenient time in the not too distant future.

Thank you. Any questions?

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'll tell you what I'm aware of – I'm aware of what I saw. What I saw was an inspiring crowd of overwhelmingly young Australians who were very well behaved in their own informal way, very respectful, clearly honoured to be there, I didn't hear one complaint from the probably up to 500 perhaps even more I personally met, perhaps even more, I think I must have been photographed with about 500 and I've probably met twice or three times that number. I was proud of the behaviour of the young Australians I saw and I will defend, after what I saw, the behaviour of young Australians overseas as a collective group any day. I felt very proud to be their Prime Minister yesterday and frankly I won't have word said against them as a group. I think they did our country proud, they were clearly honoured to be there, they participated in an enthusiastically Australian way and I think to criticise them - sure there would have been one or two people who would have behaved badly - but let us be a bit practical about this. Many of them were there for hours. It is not a place that normally accommodates such large numbers of people. A certain amount of litter after a major public event is unavoidable in our own country as you all know from your own experience of wandering around sites adjacent to the harbour on New Year's Day. I don't think we should lose our sense of proportion and perspective. So if people are criticising the behaviour of young Australians yesterday, I saw it, contrary to what perhaps some people who are writing back home did. Yes, there was litter, I saw that, but I reckon if you went back now it'd all be cleaned up and is that any different from what you see around Sydney Harbour on New Year's Day? I mean let's just have a sense of

proportion about this. But let me end by saying I was proud of the young men and women of Australia yesterday. They turned up in their thousands to demonstrate their reverence for what those young people did and the enthusiasm they displayed. The quiet they demonstrated at the right time - there was nothing untoward about their behaviour during either of the ceremonies I attended and I won't have a word said against them.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard, now that you've been back to the site since the road works have been done, what was your impression of the road works?

PRIME MINISTER:

I felt, having looked at it, I felt that some of the things that have been said about it were quite exaggerated. I can understand why some people who have followed the detail of it would say what they've said, but I also think that people who argue that it has desecrated the site - that was one of the pieces of language used - I mean that is ridiculous. And I can just say again nobody raised that issue with me yesterday. And I wasn't talking to a limited group of people. As you know I spent a bit of time mingling with the people who were there and Australians are not, in those circumstances, reluctant to express their views. Not one person I spoke to complained about the road, not one person expressed other than sheer honour and delight at the privilege of being there on Anzac Day and I think we should keep that in proportion. We should therefore keep a sense of perspective about all of this. But there are issues to be discussed and that's why I've pursued them with the Turkish Government. And just remember that this is Turkish property, this is Turkish land and they do have a large issue of crowd management and safety. Now this is only the second time that I've been to the dawn service on Gallipoli. I came five years ago. Certainly ease of movement - there was more ease of movement this time than I had experienced five years ago. Now I can't claim to be an expert on the basis of only two visits, but if you want my, you asked me having been there, I can only give you my reactions.

JOURNALIST:

What's the point of these studies now? What do you hope to achieve?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well there are a lot of other decisions that could be made about the future management. One of them is an engineering one. It will look at the technical things and it will look at the issues of erosion and so forth and they are issues properly to be looked at. And what is good about the arrangement I've reached with the Prime Minister is that it will be a joint study. Now that is very generous of the Turks. This is their property; this is their land, their country, although it has a special place in our emotions.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard, do you think it's appropriate for rock music to be played several hours in the lead up to the Dawn Service and what did you think of the Dawn Service. There have been some complaints of the service that it was a bit over-produced, it was more of an event than a service of remembrance.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I arrived there just before the prelude so I didn't know...

JOURNALIST:

There were several hours of rock music.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, I understand that. You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't, on something like this...

JOURNALIST:

Why are you damned if you don't?

PRIME MINISTER:

If you don't? Well some people will be. Look, from a personal point of view, because I don't have to spend hours there, I mean it's easy for me to say 'oh well you shouldn't have any kind of entertainment' because I don't have to spend hours there beforehand. I'm never in favour of ever cheapening an event. But once again if I can draw on the field evidence that I had and I reckon it's better because I did meet a lot of people yesterday, and there's nothing better than to spend quite a bit of time, as I did, meeting hundreds of people who had been there. None of them complained to me about - I didn't know about the Bee Gees until I read it in the paper this morning. I read it in my clips, and I always read my clips. I've got to prepare for you characters apart from anything else. So I always read my clips and it was only then that I knew. Nobody complained to me about the Bee Gees.

JOURNALIST:

Well was it right or wrong?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I think people will, look, I'm not going to express a view on that for the simple reason that in organising an event like that you've got to try and cater for a range of views. I mean I'm no great fan of those particular songs if I might say so. So that might colour my view.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, you mentioned the issue of Turkish sovereignty and heritage listing. Where have today's talks left the question of possible listing of the Gallipoli site? Where are we up to?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I think what we've agreed out of this is whether there is some way, consistent with Turkish sovereignty and perceptions by Turkey of her sovereignty, that it can enjoy a symbolic listing. Now there are things other than listing on the Australian heritage list. There are some international possibilities but that's something we're going to have a look at.

JOURNALIST:

It seems Mr Howard that maybe it was a bit pre-emptive of the Australian Government to declare...

PRIME MINISTER:

No, hang on, hang on. I always said that it was subject to discussion with the Turkish Government. I said that way back when it was announced. I didn't list it. I

didn't declare it was going to be listed. I said it would be listed subject to discussions with the Turkish Government.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

I always listen to the RSL. I always consult the RSL and I'm quite certain that when arrangements are being made next year for the Anzac service the views of the RSL will be taken into account. But there was criticism of us not allowing a certain Australian entertainer to perform, of not allowing that, and now there's criticism of this, of the inclusion of these songs. I simply make the point, and look these are things that are decided by the technical organisers. I simply make the point that you can't win on something like this. I mean there were just as many people who criticised the ban on - so-called ban - on Farnham. I mean, if I may say so, I think that evening most of the commercial bulletins in Australia ran highly critical stories of that. Now that seems to sit rather oddly with the reaction of the Bee Gees.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, is there a timeframe and a dollar cost to the Australian Government on the two joint studies?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well they're going to be done quickly, but we didn't get into the sordid details of the dollar cost. Whatever is needed will be made available.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, do you think (inaudible) what sort of contribution?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we'll pay for at least half of it. I'd be happy to pay for the lot but I think the Turkish Government feels as a matter of self-respect it should also make a contribution. But I offered to pay for the lot. I think the Turkish Prime Minister would like the cost of it to be shared.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, do you think more work should be (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

On the which?

JOURNALIST:

On the Gallipoli peninsula.

PRIME MINISTER:

More work? Well I think you have to always do work to maintain the quality of the infrastructure that is there. As to what further additional work might be done, that's one of the reasons why we're having the joint study. And I can stress the

advantage of this is you then actually have a joint study which will benchmark future changes and this is a study in which Australia will be sitting down with their equivalents from Turkey. I mean that is a huge acceptance by Turkey of Australia's role in relation to this and I again want to record my gratitude to them.

JOURNALIST:

What did you think of the New Zealand Defence Force Chief's comments that the Gallipoli campaigned (inaudible) imperial (inaudible) in Britain?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think if you want to know my views on the place of ANZAC and what happened in Gallipoli and what it represented in terms of the valour of young men, have a look at my own speech. I'd rather my views on these matters be interpreted through what I said and not what anybody else said or what I might say in response to what anybody else said. I'm not going to talk about Anzac Day and my views about Gallipoli by way of response to what somebody else.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard (inaudible) yesterday's ceremony (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

I have no idea. But whatever it was, was worth every penny.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, as a result of today's talks are you more or less confident of achieving heritage listing?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well you're talking about heritage listing on the Australian register?

JOURNALIST:

I'm talking about the (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well there are all sorts of listings. What I have said, and let me repeat it. The Turkish Government has reservations about a bald listing on the Australian register because of sensitivities to - they think that could be seen as a derogation of sovereignty. What we've agreed today is to examine a way in which there could be some symbolic recognition. So until we've completed that process I can't give a conclusive answer to your question.

JOURNALIST:

It seems unlikely it'll be...

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Mark, you will make whatever comment you chose.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible) symbolic..

PRIME MINISTER:

Well what it means is simply that, that you often put something on a register or you go through a process which gives it some additional symbolic recognition.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard, you say that you're not in favour of the event (inaudible) cheapened, do you believe it was cheapened this year?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I didn't hear the Bee Gees. I mean you can't answer something... I'm sorry, I wasn't there when it was playing. My own experience, everything I participated and I saw, I didn't think that cheapened it one bit - that was my own experience.

JOURNALIST:

The big video screens, the lights...

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't think so, given once again, you've got to balance a whole lot of things. We've all got to be conscious, all of us, of different generations. Different generations express their feelings and their views in different ways. I can only tell you that every young person I met yesterday felt they had participated in something that was uniquely Australian. That meant a lot to them, made them very proud to be Australian and made them very proud and reverential towards the young men who died all those years ago. Now that's good enough for me. If it's not good enough for other people well that's a matter for them and I'm not dismissing their views. They can put whatever views they like. But I am, on this occasion, I am defiantly sticking up for the behaviour and the decorum and the general reverence of the young of Australia. I thought they were outstanding and it was one of the greatest experiences I've had as Prime Minister to be with them yesterday, to meet them, to have transmitted to me their sense of occasion, their sense of enthusiasm, their sense of pride and their sense of being Australian. Now I thought it was great and therefore the things that have contributed to that feeling, which ought to make even the most traditional expression of Australian patriotism by a person well satisfied.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, will either of these studies (inaudible) bones have been disturbed in (inaudible)?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well there's no suggestion that interred remains have been disturbed, nobody has suggested that.

JOURNALIST:

I've spoken to one historian who says that the (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well in any battlefield, I mean I'm sure that if you go to any part of France, northern France, if you go to many areas of the country that you are now in you

will find uninterred remains. That is sadly an element of war but I'm quite certain that those things in the broad will be covered by archaeological examination. But to my knowledge, and once again can we keep a sense of perspective about this, that no cemeteries in my understanding have been disturbed - nobody has even alleged that they've been disturbed. But you cannot rule out the possibility in doing work on any battlefield site of turning up bones. I mean remains are still being discovered in Northern France and in Belgium almost 90 years, well 90 years now, after the Great War took place there. And they'll probably still be discovered in 20 or 30 years' time because of the horrific loss of life in such indescribable circumstances.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, what's your name?

JOURNALIST:

James Button from the Sydney Morning Herald.

PRIME MINISTER:

Sorry James, I apologise.

JOURNALIST:

The retaining wall (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well there's a suggestion that on the actual beachfront in Anzac Cove they will build a retaining wall to reinforce the road and we have expressed concern about that and I had formal representations made by the Ambassador to the Turkish Government and they've agreed not to do anything further on that and that's one of the things that will obviously be looked at in the light of the study. But the reason we've got concerns about that is that we think that would run the risk of significantly altering the appearance of the very place where the landing took place. I think that's right. But on the other hand, a lot of work has already been done to alter the appearance. Now where the memorial, where the ceremony area is constructed, although it's not directly at the site of the landing, some people might argue that has altered the aspect. I mean where do you start and where do you finish? I mean to the extent necessary to make it possible for large numbers of people to visit you have to change the landscape in some way, otherwise you don't have any way of getting in or out. But once you go a certain distance then people say that's too far and others would disagree. Now it's just question of striking a balance.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible) when you saw the road?

PRIME MINISTER:

I beg your pardon?

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well from a point of view of passage no. I understand why people would be. It's the work that was done on the hill that people are concerned about and that was certainly noticeable. I think it will be less noticeable when the vegetation grows. Look, let me put it this way, I can understand why people would have expressed their disappointment. I can't understand if they're being fair dinkum why they would call it desecration, because apparently according to some people, a little bit of desecration is acceptable, but a large amount is not. I mean if you have any kind of road work done by that strict definition - because it alters the original landscape - that's desecration. But when it gets a bit bigger then apparently its character changes. But I think there are some people who aren't being fair dinkum about this. I think you know who I'm referring to.

JOURNALIST:

Given the size of the crowds and the likelihood that will only increase, what's the possibility (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I would not want to do that under any circumstances and I've heard some reference to capping, well I'm opposed to that. That would disadvantage Australia because most of the people who go are Australians. I mean it was obvious that the overwhelming majority of the people present yesterday were Australians.

JOURNALIST:

That makes it inevitable then for the 100th anniversary (inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm not an expert on these matters Jim but I certainly would want to make sure that necessary work was done so that the 100th anniversary of the landing could be marked in an appropriate way.

JOURNALIST:

How much of the...

PRIME MINISTER:

I'm sorry I didn't hear you Emma.

JOURNALIST:

How much of a say would you like in future work on the peninsula?

PRIME MINISTER:

How much say do I believe the Prime Minister of Australia and the Government should have? Well whatever say is acceptable to the Turkish Government which is the ultimate master of what happens because it's Turkish territory. My experience, and it's reinforced by what happened today, my experience is that the Turkish Government is trying very hard, consistent with its own responsibilities and also consistent with the fact that the interests of the Turkish people in the peninsula lies elsewhere for reasons we all understand. The deeds the Turks honour necessarily have a slightly different location focus than the