



Prime Minister of Australia

The Hon Julia Gillard MP

# Transcript of interview with Laurie Oakes, Weekend Today

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Prime Minister

*Subject(s): Leadership change; Population; Asylum seekers; ETS; SPT; Ministerial arrangements*

OAKES: Prime Minister, welcome to the program.

PM: Good morning, Laurie.

OAKES: And congratulations, of course.

PM: Thank you very much.

OAKES: But I've got to ask you the question Richard Carlton famously asked Bob Hawke - how does it feel to have blood on your hands?

PM: Well, Laurie, my answer will be I was a loyal deputy. I came to a decision about what was in the best interests of the nation to get the Government back on track. I obviously stand by that decision. It's my decision.

OAKES: It's true though isn't it, that you told Kevin Rudd on Wednesday that you'd been thinking of toppling him for a while?

PM: Laurie, I'm not now or indeed at any time in the future going to canvas publically my conversations with Kevin Rudd that night or indeed conversations I had with him during the time we were Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

OAKES: I'll re-phrase it, then. Had you been thinking of toppling him for a while?

PM: Laurie, I had had concerns about some of the directions of the Government. I believe we were a good Government. I think we'd done good things, for example, the response to the global financial crisis; keeping Australians working. This was important. We did what had to be done in the face of that international challenge.



PM: Well, I'm indicating a different approach Laurie. I think we want an Australia that is sustainable. This place is our sanctuary, our home. We all wish it best for the future and I think for the best future we shouldn't just hurtle down a track. We should pause, we should take a breath, we should reflect and we should get this right.

OAKES: OK, you don't want people going to western Sydney, but you say other areas of Australia need more workers, so, how do you get people to go where you want them?

PM: Well, one good way of doing that is to make sure we've got a focus on employers sponsoring people who are the skilled labour that they need. So, having looked at the Australian population with us doing the right things about training, if we still need skilled migrants then of course we should enable them to come.

Laurie, I'm a migrant. My parents came here at a time that the country was saying to the world 'we've got a population of around about 11 million, 'Australia, in those days, 'we want to build it up.' Big focus then on populate or perish, you would probably remember.

OAKES: I do.

PM: And, you know, Australia reached out for the right kind of migrants and I hope people would conclude my parents were the right kind of migrants. So, we'll still have an approach about getting the migration settings right, about meeting our needs for skilled labour, but I also want to see us do it sustainably and I want to see us emphasise the skills and training of our own people. I don't want employers telling me that they can't get the workers they need when in some parts of this country we've got youth unemployment in double digits. I want to offer those young kids a chance, as well as have the migration setting right so employers get the workers they need in the places they need them.

OAKES: OK, this is a population policy, or at least you've asked Tony Burke to develop a population policy, as Kevin Rudd had, but that's not going to solve the problem of asylum seekers arriving by boat, is it?

PM: I'm obviously concerned about asylum seekers, about boats. I've indicated that concern and I think the Australian community feels it. It does make them anxious when they see boats. A little-known statistic though Laurie is we intercept 98 per cent of boats. Under the Howard Government 1 in 10 reached the mainland.

But, we've got to best manage our borders. We've got more assets patrolling our borders than ever before but I want to make sure we're doing everything effective in this area.

This isn't about slogans. To use an old saying, in an area like this tough ain't enough. It's about being effective and that's what I want to ensure - that we are being effective. I've got a decision to make quite quickly about what to do about the processing pause we've got in place. We indicated that would be for three months.

OAKES: That's for Afghans and Sri Lankans.

PM: The first pause was for Sri Lankans, that's coming up in three months. The due date then is the 8th of July, so I've got a decision to make about that and I'll have more to say about these matters before that due date of the 8th of July.

OAKES: Of course, some of the people who moved over to the Greens were protesting against Kevin Rudd's imposition of that. They saw you as being harsh to refugees. Are you going to soften that so you get those people back?

PM: I believe in doing the effective things to manage our borders. I also believe this nation needs to honour its obligations to people who are genuine refugees and honour what I think is an Australian value about care and concern for children. I don't think Australians want to see innocent children behind razor wire, whatever decisions their parents may or may not have taken. Whatever people think about those decisions, the kids didn't make those decisions and they deserve the best of our care and concern.

OAKES: Well, another boat load arrived yesterday, 96 asylum seekers, so the Liberals would say it shows your policy's not working.

PM: Well, you know, once again, slogans are easy to engage in here -

OAKES: - Well, they are. I was going to ask you about that. You talked about how many votes your Government intercepts. John Howard's government intercepted the same number of boats and yet you, as Shadow Minister of course, as I reminded you last October, came out with the immortal line 'another boat, another policy failure.' So, you can't wriggle out of that. That's your line and your verdict.

PM: Laurie, well, let's just have a look at the facts here.

OAKES: Well, we had another boat yesterday. Another policy failure?

PM: And we intercept 98 per cent of boats now -

OAKES: - So did John Howard, and you said that.

PM: Well, under the Howard Government 1 in 10 used to hit the mainland. They weren't intercepted, so our interception rates are better than they used to be.

On my old press release, having had that interview with Laurie I did get out the old files and have a look at it - you've got a far better memory than me - and when I looked at it, the contents of that press release were about urging the Howard Government to do more, to patrol our borders, more naval assets. Well, we have more naval assets there now and the contents of that press release were about working co-operatively with our regional neighbours and obviously we do work with Indonesia and others and I will be open to looking at further effective measures to drive that cooperation and work.

OAKES: It's fair to say isn't it, that as Shadow Minister after the 2001 Tampa election, as Shadow Immigration Minister you actually were the substantive author of the policies which Kevin Rudd's government adopted? Is that fair?

PM: I was the substantive author of a policy paper which became Labor's policy. It was called Protecting Australia, Protecting the Australian Way.

OAKES: And was adopted in Government.

PM: It was adopted by the then Labor Opposition. Obviously, my successors in the portfolio put some of their own stamps on this and we brought that policy into government.

OAKES: But it is basically what you advised, wasn't it?

PM: Oh, look, I think the underpinnings were in that document, Protecting Australia, Protecting the Australian Way. Some things have happened since I authored that document of course - you know, the circumstances in Sri Lanka, for example, have changed radically since I authored that document, but you know, if you're asking me, Laurie, 'does my attitude remain the same?', my attitude is exactly the same and I think it's caught by that title: Protecting Australia. We want to do that. This is our sanctuary, this is our home. Protecting the Australian way, I think that's about protecting values like we've all got care and concern for innocent children and we want to extend to them our best.

OAKES: Now, you've now been pinged, along with Wayne Swan, as responsible for the shelving of the emissions trading system, the decision that more than anything else shredded Kevin Rudd's credibility. Do you accept responsibility for that?

PM: I accept my fair share of-

OAKES: -Which sounds like the lion's share from the reports we've had of the discussion.

PM: Well, I accept my fair share of the responsibility for all of the decisions that happened when Kevin Rudd was prime minister. I accept my fair share for the good things and the bad things.

OAKES: But you did argue that the ETS should be dumped because it was hurting Labor politically. Is that true?

PM: Laurie, was concerned that if you are going to do something as big to your economy as put a price on carbon, with the economic transformation that implies, with changing the way in which we live, you need a lasting and deep community consensus to do it and I don't believe we have that lasting and deep community consensus now. Now I believe we should have a price on carbon and I will be prepared to argue for a price on carbon, to lead so that we get to that lasting and deep community consensus, but we're not there yet. We can take practical measures on climate change.

I believe in climate change, I believe it's caused by human activity and I believe we've got an obligation to act and I'll be making some statements about some further things we can do to address the challenge of climate change as we work to that lasting and deep community consensus.

OAKES: You didn't actually say as Kevin Rudd did that this is a great moral challenge of our time, but you did, as recently as December, say that delaying the ETS was the same as climate change denial. Are you a denier?

PM: Well, no, Laurie, I'm not a denier. I'm not a denier, but I'm someone who believes that you've got to take the community with you when you make lasting and deep changes. Now, as Prime Minister, as a leader, I've got an obligation to have the conversation, to have the discussion, to indicate the attitudes and I'm doing that today.

I believe in the future of this we will have a price on carbon. I believe we will transform our economy the way that that price implies. I believe there will be ways in which we live that are different, but that's something that the community has to have a part in the decision, a part in the conversation and we've got to drive the consensus for change.

OAKES: Now, it seems to me and a lot of other people that in terms of policy, the three things, three big problems the Rudd Government had were asylum seeker policy, the ETS back flip and the mining tax.

Now, Kevin Rudd basically followed your asylum seeker policy, he did what you wanted on the emissions trading system. I don't know if you could be blamed for the mining tax, but two out three ain't bad.

PM: Well Laurie, I can understand that as a sort of patter, if I can use that terminology -

OAKES: - I hope it's more than that.

PM: I can understand why you've wanted to put that patter together, but let's actually get to the facts here. I am indicating to you my attitudes. I take my fair share of the responsibility for the decisions of the Rudd Government. I was vice-captain of the team. That's a different position from captain of the team. Now I have the position of captain with all the ultimate responsibility that goes with that, and you will see, as I exercise that ultimate responsibility, what my attitudes are to each of the questions that you've indicated today.

OAKES: Well, let's go to the third one - can Captain Gillard get the mining tax out of the way in time for the election?

PM: Well, I think I've taken a big step forward. On the first day as Prime Minister, my very first press conference, I think I took a big step forward for goodwill and respect in the discussion about the mining tax by saying we, the Government, would take our ads off TV screens if the mining industry did the same and we offered it - it wasn't conditional - we offered it unconditionally. We asked the mining industry



