



TRANSCRIPT

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

The Hon Bob Debus MP

Minister for Home Affairs

Whaling Announcement – release of images from the Oceanic Viking
Doorstop interview
Maroubra, NSW
9.00 am, 7 February 2008

PETER GARRETT:

Thanks everybody.

You would have seen some images this morning of the activities in the Southern Ocean; I want to welcome Bob Debus to this electorate of Kingsford Smith, as Customs Minister, and hand over to him now. Thanks Bob.

BOB DEBUS:

Thanks Peter. I thought I might just make a statement before we answer questions.

The role of the Oceanic Viking has always been for monitoring and surveillance of the Japanese whaling fleet. And since January 31st Customs officers have collected photographic and video evidence of whales being killed, and as we have always said, the purpose of gathering that evidence is so that it can be used in any potential international legal action against Japan. I can announce today, after reviewing the footage sent back by the Oceanic Viking, that we have decided that it is overwhelmingly in the public interest to release some of the images that have been collected.

The material we are releasing today demonstrates the effectiveness of Australia's operation and the success of the Oceanic Viking in its evidence gathering mission. I can also announce today that the Government has decided to extend that operation. The original mission was for 20 days and the ship had been due to return

quite soon. But we'll now maintain the Oceanic Viking's presence for a longer period to continue to gather evidence. Just because we have collected footage of whaling activity does not mean that the commitment has ended. For operational reasons I can't reveal exactly how long the ship will continue to be in the Antarctic.

But finally, I would like to congratulate the Customs officers who have done such a fantastic job in extremely tough conditions. The Southern Ocean is a very remote place indeed. The officers who captured these shocking images had to endure up to eight hours in the open sea in tiny boats in temperatures around zero. They have performed a most difficult task with great distinction and I do congratulate them for what they have done, on behalf of the Government and more particularly on behalf of the Australian people.

REPORTER: What is the Government going to do with the evidence that you've gathered?

BOB DEBUS: It has always been the Government's purpose to use this footage as evidence in any potential legal case.

REPORTER: So what's the evidence? You've got photos of them doing what they've been doing for years?

BOB DEBUS: We've got evidence of whaling being carried out in circumstances that we believe, it should not be done.

REPORTER: What circumstances are they that you think they should not be done? How do these photographs back that argument?

BOB DEBUS: These photographs show the reality of whaling, the reality of the slaughter of these animals and they will help us to back up the Australian Government's argument in an international court case, the details of

which are still being worked out, to suggest that whaling should be stopped. That is the will of the Australian people and that is indeed the opinion, I believe, of most of the governments of the world.

REPORTER: Is there an international court case that has been launched, or about to be launched? Are prosecutions imminent?

BOB DEBUS: The court case is a matter that is obviously still under consideration by the Attorney-General.

REPORTER: Which court would that be?

BOB DEBUS: It could be a number of places. It could be a variety of international fora. That is indeed what the Attorney-General is still considering at the moment.

REPORTER: Can you name one of them?

REPORTER: ...One of those courts sir?

BOB DEBUS: The International Whaling Commission itself, the International Court of Justice.

PETER GARRETT: Can I just add something to what Mr Debus has said. I think it's clear that these pictures tell a very sad story. This is the indiscriminate killing of a whale and its calf. It's not scientific, and these pictures make crystal clear what's actually happening in the Southern Ocean.

And make crystal clear why we so strongly oppose the activities of the Japanese whalers there. The power of the camera is a powerful one. It's been used in the past to highlight what's gone on in different parts of the world where there is something which people feel strongly about. The power of the camera and the release of some of this footage means that not only Australians,

who care deeply about the fate of these beautiful creatures, but people right around the world, will have a better sense of what's going on down there in the Southern Ocean.

REPORTER: Does your evidence show, even though it's as graphic as it is, does it show that it's not scientific research?

PETER GARRETT: Well I think that, I'll just take that and then hand over to Mr Debus...I think it's explicitly clear from these images that this is indiscriminate killing of whales, where you have a whale and its calf killed in this way. And to claim that this is in any way scientific is to continue the charade that has surrounded this issue from day one.

BOB DEBUS: How can it conceivably be, that killing 1000 whales, a quota announced in advance, is in some fashion scientific. It is just absurd to suggest that.

REPORTER: Who would be pursued through the prosecutions? Individuals or the Japanese Government?

BOB DEBUS: That's exactly the kind of thing that we are examining at the moment.

REPORTER: Are we putting Japan on notice then, to say right, we've got the evidence, get ready to meet you in court?

BOB DEBUS: We are saying to the world, that the Australian people and the Australian Government object to this activity and that we will do all that we can, in court and diplomatically to resist the continued activity of whaling.

REPORTER: You've obviously spoken with the Attorney-General, how close is he to making a decision...(inaudible)

BOB DEBUS: I cannot say that.

REPORTER: Days, weeks, away?

BOB DEBUS: I cannot say.

REPORTER: Why were the press releases prior to the election saying that you would take action on this, why haven't you already started?

PETER GARRETT: I cannot think of a greater example of taking of action than what the Rudd Labor Government has done in respect of this whaling issue.

For 11 years, previous government ministers ran around the world making speeches and going in and out of the International Whaling Commission, foregoing the options of legal action, refusing to commit Australia in any other way to taking significant action to oppose Japanese whaling.

What we've seen since the Rudd Labor Government came into power, is a concerted, multi-pronged and deliberate effort to ensure that we have a strong campaign against Japanese whaling.

We've always said that this would be long-haul; we've always said that it would require judicious and careful consideration of the issues. It has a diplomatic component, it has the potential for a legal component, we've had these images that have been collected today from a successful operation by the Oceanic Viking already, and as the Minister has indicated, an operation that is going to be extended. These are the clear signs, and the evidence of positive and strong and concrete action by this Government on the issue of whaling.

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| REPORTER: | Why isn't it scientific to kill a juvenile of a species to take it for research? |
| PETER GARRETT: | The scientists who have considered carefully the material that has been put forward by Japanese scientists in the past, making some claim that their whaling is scientific, have found that it is without foundation. And I can tell you why - because there are non-lethal ways of researching whales. And in fact Australia and Australian scientists are leading the world in non-lethal research, scientific research, to better understand these beautiful creatures. You do not have to kill a whale in the Southern Ocean to gain a deeper understanding of it. That is a practice which we completely and deliberately oppose and it's a practice which we'll continue to oppose. |
| REPORTER: | With respect to the good work of Customs, I mean they've gathered this evidence, but Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherd have been gathering this evidence for years? Same sort of thing...? |
| BOB DEBUS: | This is evidence from the Australian Government; this is evidence which is collected in a context of the Australian Government's diplomatic actions, its potential legal actions on behalf of the Australian people in the world. Surely it is more significant that the government of a free and democratic country should be engaged in this kind of activity, than it is that a private or non-government organisation should be so engaged. |
| REPORTER: | Are you extending or expanding the Oceanic Viking's activities, or both? |
| BOB DEBUS: | Extending. |
| REPORTER: | So it's not going to be a bigger operation, it's just going to be continuing for a longer period of time? |

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| BOB DEBUS: | The operation will continue for a number of days, it had been planned that it would end within a few days from now, but in fact it is being extended further. Obviously I will not talk about the exact details, for operational reasons. |
| REPORTER: | Mr Debus, do you know when the photo was taken? |
| BOB DEBUS: | Within the last several weeks. A number of photos were taken over a number of days. |
| REPORTER: | The one that is on the front page of the Telegraph, do you know when that one was taken? |
| BOB DEBUS: | No. |
| REPORTER: | Can you tell us how far from the Oceanic Viking the photographers travelled in the IRB's? |
| BOB DEBUS: | My understanding is that the Customs Officer's travelled up to 10 nautical miles away from the Oceanic Viking to take these photographs. |
| REPORTER: | Peter, have you been in a position now that you're the Environment Minister to talk to your Japanese counterpart on this issue? |
| PETER GARRETT: | I expect to speak not only to my Japanese counterpart, but to other environment ministers in the run up to the intercessional of the IWC. And we are going to build a consensus of like-minded nations to get stuck into some reform of the IWC so that the loophole which permits this to be named 'scientific' whaling is closed. |
| REORTER: | When is the IWC? |

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| PETER GARRETT: | The IWC intercessional meets in March and we'll be in Chile in June. |
| REORTER: | Mr Garrett, just on another issue, why have you involved the DPP this week in relation to the clearing of bird wetlands on the Gwydir River? |
| PETER GARRETT: | This Government takes very seriously the issue of illegal land clearing when it affects matters of Commonwealth legislative remit. In other words, we take very seriously issues of illegal land clearing if it affects matters of Commonwealth environmental importance. And there's been a thorough investigation into these alleged activities and I understand that the DPP will make a decision about whether or not there will be prosecutions at a later date. But I think it says very clearly that we take our responsibilities as the Commonwealth seriously, on matters of illegal land clearing. |
| REPORTER: | Do you think the State Government's investigation was inadequate? |
| PETER GARRETT: | Well I'm not saying that. I make no comment on what the State Government has done. What I would say is that I want to ensure people that the Commonwealth will play a strong role in relation to illegal land clearing where it is impacting on matters of Commonwealth and national environment importance. And here we have RAMSAR wetlands; threatened species; a range of matters that fall within the province of the Commonwealth. That being the case we are sending to the DPP for consideration on these alleged activities whether or not there'll be a prosecution. |
| REPORTER: | So you believe that the Federal <i>Vegetation Protection Act</i> (sic) has been breached in this matter? |

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| PETER GARRETT: | Well, I'm not going to speak to the detail of the allegations, because that wouldn't be proper, given that it's being referred to the DPP. What I'd simply say is that we have a strong position, which says that we'll take strong action on illegal land clearing where it falls within the remit of Commonwealth powers and Commonwealth responsibilities and I think that's what people would expect. |
| REPORTER: | With the evidence that you've gathered, any ideas on how many whales that Customs may have assessed they've seen killed? |
| BOB DEBUS | The last report that I had, the Customs officials thought there might have been up to 30 whales, but I need to say very clearly that the officials were also aware that they were not counting every possible whale that had been killed. It's just simply too difficult in the conditions down in the Southern Ocean. |
| REPORTER: | And they haven't been able to constantly hammer them, they haven't been following them the whole time? |
| BOB DEBUS | That's right. It's physically impossible to stay with all of those whaling ships all of the time - at night, in rough weather, and so on. |
| REPORTER: | Have there been any incidents at sea? Has there been any sort of action by the Japanese to shoo the Customs ship away? |
| BOB DEBUS: | As I understand it, there has been no aggressive incident between the Japanese and the Australians directly involved. |
| REPORTER: | Are they in contact, the two ships? Do they talk? |

BOB DEBUS:

I don't believe they do talk, though it is possible that they can.

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