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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

Australia's new course on international whale conservation, UN Convention against Torture, first 100 days of the Rudd Government.

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
DOORSTOP MAROUBRA BEACH
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PETER GARRETT: Thanks, everybody, for coming down this morning as the Australian Government announces a really critical initiative which will add to our repertoire of measures, continuing our robust opposition to the commercial killing of whales in the Southern Ocean and globally.

We're proposing that Australian officials at the meeting of the IWC Intersessional in London this coming week put together and bring forward a proposal from Australia which would see the IWC modernised. We want to bring the International Whaling Commission into the 21st century, and we're bringing forward a proposal which is constructive, and seeks to involve all member states, and identifies three critical areas which we believe reform of the IWC is necessary in.

They include the development of conservation plans, recognising that not only are whales threatened by so-called 'scientific' whaling in the Southern Oceans, but there's a range of other threats, through ship strikes, climate change, water conditions generally in different parts of the world, that are hazardous for them.

And we recognise secondly that there are significant gaps in the approach to science and research. We're proposing that those gaps be filled by collaborative scientific research, including and beginning with research done in the Southern Ocean. Australia already conducts some of that research. We think that there's a need for there to be a greater degree of collaboration and scientific research to fill the knowledge gaps in our knowledge of whales - their activities and habits.

And thirdly, we want an overall authority to be developed by the Commission with strict scientific evaluation, so that the loophole which permits the killing of whales in the name of science will stop.

So the Australian Government is at full-bore in our opposition to the killing of whales in the name of science. We're going absolutely flat chat here by producing a 21st century solution to the Whaling Commission, so that instead of it supervising the killing of whales in the name of science, it can start to use science and the great concern Australians and many other people in the world have about the death of these whales, and develop conservation as a major ambition for the Commission – not simply signing off on the killing of whales in the name of science.

JOURNALIST: Will Australia be part of that research program that you're talking about?

PETER GARRETT: Yes, we will. We're proposing that officials raise this when they meet in London next week. This comes on top of us sending the 'Oceanic Viking' to the Southern Ocean, collecting data and images for the contemplation of possible legal action in international courts. We're still in the business of bringing forward an announcement about a special envoy who'll go to Japan in the next couple of months. That decision will be made very soon. And it is yet another part of the repertoire that the Australian Government is bringing to our robust opposition to the killing of whales in the name of science – so-called 'scientific' whaling.

I want to stress that this proposal is the first time any Government has brought forward into the Whaling Commission a 21st century view of how we should treat these beautiful animals. We are saying that it is conservation, not killing whales, that ought to be the priority of the global community in the International Whaling Commission. We want to work cooperatively and collaboratively, and that's why we're going to bring forward this proposal next week.

JOURNALIST: [INAUDIBLE]

PETER GARRETT: Well, the Commission is the primary international forum for the determination of matters relating to whales, including so-called 'scientific' whaling. It is the centre point for debates about the future of whales, and it seems to the Australian Government to be absolutely critical that we take a leadership role, that we start to bring this International Whaling Commission into the 21st century, and have it consider these issues and these proposals that we've brought forward. And I'm hopeful that there will be a fair amount of support from like minded nations around the world when they see the proposal.

JOURNALIST: Japan have so far ignored all other diplomatic efforts – what makes you think this one's going to work?

PETER GARRETT: We have a responsibility to continue to increase our efforts, to make sure that these beautiful animals aren't killed in the name of science. And one of the ways to do that, along with the other measures that the Rudd Labor Government has identified, is to get into the International Whaling Commission, bring forward proposals for modernisation, bring forward proposals for robust science, and bring other countries on board as we build a coalition of interest which says that the practices of the past don't have the support of the populations of the future.

JOURNALIST: Has the 'Oceanic Viking' found evidence that the Japanese are not doing any scientific research whatsoever?

PETER GARRETT: In respect of the material and the data collected by the 'Oceanic Viking', we're still considering it carefully and thoroughly. Officials will spend additional time reviewing all of that material – they did collect a lot of material. And on that basis, once that examination has concluded, then we'll consider whether or not there is the potential for future legal action and the release of additional material as well.

JOURNALIST: [INAUDIBLE]

PETER GARRETT: I've instructed officials to take a proposal which modernises the IWC in those discussions in London next week. I'll be communicating with governments right around the world, with relevant environment ministers, informing them of our proposal and of the substance of it.

And we intend to be absolutely energetic, vigorous and determined in getting out there and speaking to other nations, carrying forward an agenda which says that the 'scientific' killing of whales is something Australia totally and absolutely opposes.

JOURNALIST: Why do you need a special whaling envoy, as you described it, to go to Japan, and not yourself?

PETER GARRETT: Well, we think that there is potential for a range of different measures in our opposition to the Japanese whaling activities in the Southern Ocean. Certainly I am absolutely totally and fully committed to bringing forward this particular proposal for the IWC. But there's space for a different repertoire of actions that show how serious Australia is about this issue, and I think that there's the prospect that an envoy can go to Japan and speak directly to the Japanese people, make representations to the Japanese Government, and continue to advance what we think is an absolutely essential 21st century argument, which says that we are much better watching and enjoying these beautiful creatures than we are killing them in the name of science.

JOURNALIST: Why not do that envoy job yourself? You're the Minister.

PETER GARRETT: I think that there are good precedents for envoys being able to play an important and a productive diplomatic role. I've got a range of responsibilities, which include prosecuting this case. But certainly the determination is that with the workload and the work responsibilities which I have as a Cabinet Minister, an envoy – clearly someone who understands and speaks strongly to this issue – will be very productive.

JOURNALIST: What sort of person will be an envoy? Who will it be?

PETER GARRETT: We'll make announcements in due course about that envoy.

JOURNALIST: On a different topic, this morning we've got information that Robert McClelland is considering getting Australia to sign the anti-torture agreement with the UN. Have you got an opinion on that?

PETER GARRETT: I think we're starting to see a range of decisions come through from this Government, including this particular one about the contemplation of signing that convention. Obviously I totally support it. I think that Australia is coming back in from the cold. We are wanting to play a productive role in international fora. We've got a multilateral approach to engagements with other countries, and we take those sorts of issues very seriously, and I think the comments of Mr McClelland show that very well.

JOURNALIST: And how do you think the first 100 days of Labor's term in office have been?

PETER GARRETT: I've got to say that we have not stopped since we came into government. I know I definitely haven't and neither have my colleagues. And I hope people recognise that we've really hit the ground running, and we intend to keep doing that. There's a series of initiatives that we've brought forward, and when it comes to whaling, we know that Australians are really concerned about what they've seen in the Southern Ocean. We continue to pursue this, we're in for the long haul, and we will bring forward a range of measures, including modernising the IWC, to get that job done.

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