

Doorstop Interview

Kulaluk Mudla Farms, Darwin

Tuesday, 16 May 2006

2.30pm

SUBJECTS: Mudla crab farm, Royal Darwin Hospital Oncology Unit, Macquarie Bank salaries, Indigenous Affairs, funding for new Indigenous housing

TREASURER:

It is great to be here at the Mudla Crab Farm, to try what were the most delicious crabs I have ever eaten in my life and to see a project like this which is a real commercial project giving training, giving jobs, making a profit and providing for the local people an economic base and that is what I think indigenous affairs is going to be about in the future, real economic opportunity, real jobs, real investment and real businesses.

JOURNALIST:

On the Budget, can you tell us first of all how much was contributed to an oncology unit here at RDH?

TREASURER:

Well, we set aside in our Budget \$90 million for oncology services around Australia and as we say in the Budget a large proportion of that will be for Royal Darwin Hospital for an oncology unit. Well we don't run the hospital, the hospital is run by the Territory Government, the Territory Government has got to decide what it wants to do, decide what the funding is, come back to the Commonwealth with real plans and we are ready to begin funding. So, we are ready to go, we need the Territory Government to get together its proposal and come and see us.

JOURNALIST:

They are saying \$50 million over five years, does that tally with your figures?

TREASURER:

I haven't actually looked at the figures, I know that a lot of different figures have been bandied around but what we want to see is a real business case, real investment, real plans, real proposals, starting times and when they are ready to do all of that and also to make their own commitment then the Commonwealth Government is ready to match it.

JOURNALIST:

There are reports today the head of Macquarie Bank has had a pay rise to \$21 million and as a result of the Budget his tax cuts will amount to about \$300,000, should people be paid that much money?

TREASURER:

Well, it is an incredible amount of money, isn't it, and it is hard to think that anybody would be worth that kind of salary and I can assure you that nobody in the Commonwealth Government would get a salary anywhere near that but if the shareholders of that particular bank want to approve that salary, well it is their money, the only point I would make is they should have the opportunity to determine that because it is their money, it should be disclosed to them and they should have the opportunity to either veto it or approve it.

JOURNALIST:

The Newspoll survey suggests that higher income earners maybe were less impressed with the Budget than middle income earners, do you have any view about that?

TREASURER:

I was pleased to see that Newspoll confirmed that Australians think the Budget is good for the Australian economy, overwhelmingly, and of course when they are asked the question, 'could the Opposition do as well?' They say no, 2 to 1,

and that is the critical figure in relation to a Budget. Whether you can break down what particular economic groups think or don't think I don't think it is as precise as all of that but you can see from the overall figures that Australians know it is good for the Australian economy, they know the Government is managing the economy and they are terribly worried about a prospect that Mr Beazley or Mr Shorten or whoever is going to be the Labor Leader could get in control of the economy.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard has indicated that speculation about him leaving in December, he says no, he will let it be known when that happens, will you be heading into the 12th Budget?

TREASURER:

Well, we are right in the middle of the 11th Budget and I am focussing on that absolutely, completely and utterly.

JOURNALIST:

Will we see you up here in the Budget tour again next year?

TREASURER:

I always love coming here...and I don't have to wait for Budgets to do it. I come up to help my good friend Dave Tollner and I see a lot of friends that I have got up here.

JOURNALIST:

As Treasurer or Prime Minister?

TREASURER:

And look for recruits for the Essendon Football Club.

JOURNALIST:

Are you aware of the allegations in the material raised on *Lateline* last night?

TREASURER:

I saw *Lateline*, yes, and I heard what the Crown Prosecutor had to say, it was a gruelling story of abuse and crime and I think we all ought to be concerned, every Australian ought to be concerned about some of the things that she raised, it is absolutely unacceptable and we need to enforce the law for the protection of minors and young women in particular.

JOURNALIST:

One of the things that is attributed to that part of the picture is the overcrowding when people are living 20 to 30 people to a house, Claire Martin has asked for \$50 million a year each year to help build more housing so that people aren't crammed in so closely, are you likely to support that?

TREASURER:

Well, we have got the biggest investment in housing ever that we have made and in fact today I am announcing more funding for pre-fabricated house kits where these can be assembled in Indigenous communities, you don't have to wait for a builder to come out with waiting times and inflated costs, and we are going to make pre-fabricated kit homes available so that people can put them together themselves and I think that is a very practical thing in the Territory for the communities which I am announcing today.

JOURNALIST:

Cyclone proof?

TREASURER:

Well, they won't be the strongest houses you have ever seen if they come in kits but...

TREASURER:

...I am told by the experts that they are cyclone proof.

JOURNALIST:

How much?

TREASURER:

Well, I will be putting out a release in relation to this later on this afternoon but we will be setting aside \$6 million of Australian Government funding, commissioning up to 40 new houses for remote Indigenous communities, this is in addition to the record \$3.3 billion which was provided for Indigenous Australians in the Budget, the additional \$6 million is in addition to \$21.6 million for the expansion of the home ownership programme and \$107.5 million to support and develop Indigenous home ownership. So this is just another new initiative to see if it works, it means that you won't have to wait, it will hopefully mean that the prices will be less and if we can see whether this works, these self-build kit houses, then it could be something for the future.

JOURNALIST:

You talk about economic developments in Aboriginal communities in a positive project like this, how much more can there be, what more can the Government do to try and, I guess, bring in more projects?

TREASURER:

I think the whole thing now is getting an economic base for Indigenous communities. If you haven't got an economic base there are no real jobs. If you haven't got real jobs there will be no material improvement, there will be no future for the young people and we have got to change our way of thinking, it is all about getting an economic base now which can provide real jobs. Now an economic base is a mud crab farm, that is why I have come and had a look at it. There has been some Commonwealth investment, it is a real product, sold in real commercial markets, giving real jobs for the people that are involved. But in some of the communities there is no economic base, there is no prospect of a job in the mainstream of Australian commerce and I think we have got to increasingly look at bringing Indigenous people into the economic mainstream. The idea that you can keep them in remote communities without an economic base forever and expect standards of health and education to improve, I think that is wrong. It won't work, it hasn't worked.

JOURNALIST:

So in central Australia, for example, do you see people coming into us or how.....?

TREASURER:

Well, I just think the important thing now is an economic base. Now it might be done with loans so they can set up businesses, here is an example. It might be done with agriculture, I've seen some agriculture projects by communities in Cape York. It might be done with tourism, it might be done with art. But the whole thing has now got to be a proper economic base in the mainstream of Australian commercial life.

JOURNALIST:

Does that mean some communities just won't be sustainable in the future?

TREASURER:

Well, communities will be sustainable, but they won't have real jobs to offer their children in the economic mainstream of Australian life and what I want to see is Indigenous people participating in the mainstream of Australian economic life. There is no reason why they can't do it, of course they can do it. You are seeing it here with a successful project. What we need is we need many more of these projects.

JOURNALIST:

If the Territory Government doesn't come to the party with oncology funding will an oncology unit be built here still?

TREASURER:

Well, the Commonwealth Government has set aside money to build an oncology unit at the Royal Darwin Hospital. We don't run the Royal Darwin Hospital, we don't control it, we don't have the people on the board, we don't control the land, we can't let contracts. That has got to be done by the Territory Government, it controls the hospital, it controls the land, it controls the plans, it can let contracts. We are ready with our share of the funding. I say to the Territory Government – get on with it, make sure that you take advantage of the money which the Commonwealth is offering, no more mucking around, I understand this has been though several election campaigns in the Territory and the delay is not at the Commonwealth end.

Thank you.

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