



LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WARRINGAH

12 January 2010

TRANSCRIPT OF THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR AND MR WARREN ENTSCH
INTERVIEW WITH JOHN MACKENZIE,
RADIO 4CA, CAIRNS

Subjects: Private Member's Bill to overturn the Wild Rivers Act; alcohol management plans; Coral Sea Conservation Zone; foreign investment.

E&OE.....

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, good morning and welcome.

TONY ABBOTT:

G'day John. Nice to be here.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

First time you've sat in here although I know you are a regular visitor to the Far North and I appreciate that. I've got to say too we were very well served by John Howard when he was Prime Minister, particularly in light of the emergency we had in Innisfail. He was on the phone what, twenty minutes after it crossed the coast at Innisfail. He said 'I'll be back shortly to check how things are going'. He arrived; he came back a few months later to check out things. So we have been well served by the former Prime Minister. I would hope you have a similar determination to look after us up here when and if you take the reins

TONY ABBOTT:

That's certainly my plan, John, and I think the three weeks I spent as a teacher's aide in Coen in 2008 and the 10 days I spent helping the truancy team in Arukun last year are indications of good faith.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

You spent time with Ian Mackie too. That would give you a really good understanding of the challenges that face the Federal Government in that regard in those communities up here.

TONY ABBOTT:

Absolutely right. I mean, Ian Mackie has been a very dynamic force in the education sector up here in Cape York. He and I didn't see eye to eye on everything but certainly I respect his views and I think he's done a lot of good.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Tony, look, I've got a million things I want to talk to you about. That's unfair – we've got people on the line waiting to talk to you. But let's go straight to the chase. Page one of *The Australian* today details what you intend to do regarding the Wild Rivers legislation. Tell us in your own words.

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, I want to overturn the Wild Rivers legislation at least insofar as it applies to Cape York. This legislation was imposed on the people of Cape York without any serious consultation. It's effectively locked up the land. I know the Queensland Government says that, you know, you can't show us the proposals that have been stopped. The truth is the proposals are being suffocated at birth because Aboriginal people and Aboriginal organisations don't have the tens of thousands of dollars that they need to chase these proposals through the bureaucratic thicket which the Wild Rivers legislation has made vastly worse.

So when the State Government really stuffs up, as I think it has here, and the Federal Government does have the power to intervene, it should intervene. Kevin Rudd can't ignore this issue and the voice of the people of Cape York will be heard in the Federal Parliament via this bill of mine.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

I've got to say this, mind you, I picked up on page one the Australian today – I think it was on page one. There it is. Gerhardt Pearson, it says, opposed to the Bligh Government's Wild Rivers legislation. Actually, Warren Entsch can help me with this one. I thought Gerhardt was actually supportive of it and Noel was opposing it.

WARREN ENTSCH:

No, no, Gerhardt's with Balkanu. I mean, initially they were trying to work with the Wilderness Society and trying to get some sort of a positive outcome but they discovered very quickly in the piece that the Wilderness Society was out for their own outcome. Once they had achieved that, you know, the interests of the Aboriginal people who are the traditional owners of Cape York went out the window, and Gerhardt has been very, very strongly opposed, as has Noel, to a point where Noel stepped down in his role at the Cape York Institute in protest over the implementation of Wild Rivers.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Tony, this statement of yours today will be seen as a bridge too far by some people saying hold the phone, what's the point – if the Federal Government can intervene any time it doesn't approve of a state government's actions, what's the point of having a state government?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, I'm not saying that we can or should intervene any time, but where the state government has done something which is sufficiently bad, and the federal government has a head of power, well frankly it's derelict in its duty not to intervene. I mean, what's the point of having a federal government if it can't from time to time say, 'look states, you're not doing the right thing; it's in the national interest that we do something better'. I mean, in the end, John, I think in modern Australia there's got to be a hierarchy of government. Plainly state government is sovereign over local government – that's always been the way. And that doesn't mean you abolish local government, it just means that when the local council has done a really, really bad job the state government can step in. Similarly, I think today people would say that the national government is higher in the pecking order than state government.

Sure states have their legitimate role but where they have really stuffed up people expect the federal government to be able to get involved and make a difference.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Well, the state government has really stuffed up with the alcohol management plans. Our wastelands around this city are awash with the worst behaved people from the communities. Are you going to intervene and sort that out?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, I'm in favour of alcohol management plans but my understanding is that they haven't been well-implemented. I know what happens when alcohol management plans are brought in in remote communities – the drunks come to the big centres. It's happened in the Territory where the drunks have gone to Alice Springs or to Darwin or to Tennant Creek. It seems to be happening here in Cape York where the drunks have gravitated to Cairns. That is obviously not good for Cairns, but at least in Cairns there ought to be more capacity to deal with it. You ought to have the alcohol rehabilitation centre here. Unfortunately the Rudd Government has cut funding to Douglas House here in Cairns that used to do that job very well.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

That would be voluntary anyway. A lot of these people may be seen to be beyond help. We've got police being called, I'm told, every day to Lyons Street. Do we have extra resources allocated by the state government? Not that I'm aware of.

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, there should be. There should be. I mean where you've got alcohol management plans put in place you've got to have the ability to enforce them in those local communities and you've then got to have the resources in the major centres to deal with the alcohol migrants who go from the places that are now dry to the places that are still wet.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Well, I repeat my point: will you intervene?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, where the federal government can help it should help, and in the Territory, where the alcohol management plans were put in place at federal insistence, yes there's been a massive increase in federal resources to try to help cope with the consequences.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

But nothing here. Nothing here at all. Now, another point. Will you intervene when it comes to our precious amateurs? We've had liquor licensing Brisbane at the behest of our state government. Almost closed the thing by the most harsh, draconian restrictions on the age limit being applied, on entrance to our amateurs, on liquor restrictions now with only the lightest of alcohol being available – it goes on. Once again we've got this tide of anger in our community that's being totally ignored by our four state Labor members.

TONY ABBOTT:

And look, John, the issue which has been most forcefully brought to my attention thus far is the Wild Rivers Act, and that's what I am proposing to intervene on today. I know that there is a problem with the lack of

services for detoxification and rehabilitation, particularly for Aboriginal people, because last time I was in Cairns Warren Entsch took me to Douglas House and alerted me to the fact that this had been defunded because of the Federal Government.

WARREN ENTSCH:

John, can I say also that one of the things that we're pushing very strong for and I'll be raising it with Tony is that with these alcohol management plans, they cannot work – you talk about the influx into the cities – we need medical detoxification units up in the communities so that the alcoholics can be dealt with within their communities, get the medical detox, get the rehabilitation done up there rather than forcing them back into the communities. And that is basic infrastructure that should have been put in before the brought in the alcohol management plans...

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Six years ago.

WARREN ENTSCH:

And they still have not got detox centres in the Weipa hospital, at the Bamaga hospital or the Cooktown hospital. That's where you start to deal with, put the detox centres in there first. Let them deal with these problems with medical detox in their own communities. You'll find a hell of a lot less people coming down here. That's the start of dealing with the problem and that's what I'll be raising with Tony.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Warren, can you put headphones on, because we're about to start taking open line calls. First up we've got Rob Erskine on the line, Erskine's Tackle. G'day Rob. You're talking to the Opposition Leader.

CALLER:

How you going guys? Tony and Warren, how are you both?

TONY ABBOTT:

G'day, Rob. I'm well and Warren looks pretty well to me.

WARREN ENTSCH:

Absolutely.

CALLER:

Warren's always well. He's fighting fit, isn't he?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, he reckons he can't run ten kilometres, but apart from that he's fighting fit.

CALLER:

Mate, my concern today is I just want to see whether you're up to speed on the Coral Sea Conservation Zone. As you know Mr Garrett proclaimed a Conservation Zone over approximately a million square kilometres of the Coral Sea, which totally short-circuited the Marine Bioregional Plan that is a process set up

to deal with the zoning of the Coral Sea, and he's come out and totally short-circuited that by declaring a Conservation Zone. This was done with no public consultation except with – and acknowledged by DEWHA – with a few charitable trusts and the Australian Conservation Foundation of which Mr Garrett was a former President. What's your view and opinion on this zone, mate, where people up here, especially the charter boat industry, the fishing tourism industry and that are going to suffer major impacts, and are already having impacts on their businesses because they've lost value. People don't know what's going to happen. They're scared of it being all tagged down and generally charters are being cancelled and people saying what is going on and no one can tell them and they're very worried about their futures. What's your opinion on this one?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well Rob, my disposition is to oppose it and it seems to have been typical of the Rudd Government to have brought this in without serious consultation. Now, Warren is much more familiar with the issue than I am, obviously, but on the preliminary briefing that I've had from Warren and the advice I've had from people like Ron Boswell it sounds like it was not a good thing. My recollection is that the Coalition in the Senate tried to stop the relevant change but was unfortunately unsuccessful.

CALLER:

Yeah that's right mate. In the Senate there was a tied vote...

WARREN ENTSCH:

Hey Rob, if I could just cut in there mate. I sent a whole lot of material, actually I took it down to Sydney to Tony only a couple of days ago in relation to this issue. I also got some very good stuff from Walter Starkey and also with the compliments of Bill Izzard, and Tony has been focusing on the Wild Rivers because I see an opportunity on what he's doing on Wild Rivers there. He needs to look at this, but I've asked him before he gets into too much detail to make sure that he's right across the issue and as you know people like yourself that are living it every day are right across it. Tony is becoming very, very aware of it. Now he's got some DVDs that he's got to watch, he's got a fair bit of material he's got to get through and I've asked him to keep that and in the near future will be able to come back and singularly focus on that as he is Wild Rivers this time.

TONY ABBOTT:

Yeah, I think Rob that will be the focus of my next up to Cairns.

CALLER:

That's fantastic mate. Good to hear and congratulations on your new position.

TONY ABBOTT:

Thanks so much.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Got Julie on the line at Brinsmead. Julie you're talking to the Opposition Leader and Warren Entsch.

CALLER:

Thanks John, good morning Tony.

TONY ABBOTT:

Morning, Julie.

CALLER:

And congratulations on becoming Leader, I don't think I've ever felt more relieved with any political decision than when Malcolm Turnbull was no longer trying to lead the Coalition and therefore as a result the ETS was knocked back, but there are so many issues I could ask you about for example hospitals or crime or Peter Spencer's situation but the one apart from the ETS that concerns me most is the influx of illegal immigrants.

Mostly I don't believe that the Immigration Department or Government would know whether any of these people are genuine refugees or not and it seems to me that even once they send them to Christmas Island seek them I just don't believe they would ever always find out whether they are genuine and it seems to me that Kevin Rudd doesn't care who he allows into the country and I actually feel that he some agenda to increase Australia's population and that allowing any illegal immigrant in is one way of doing this.

Really our population is growing too quickly to keep up with the infrastructure, and by the way everyone I know seems to feel the same about you know illegal immigrants just being brought in willy-nilly or coming in willy-nilly. So there are some months until there is an election, is there anything the Coalition can do to force Rudd to stop this dangerous open door policy?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, I think the best think that we can do is an opposition is to expose his policy failures and, as you'd know Julie, John Howard found a problem and created a solution. Kevin Rudd to his discredit found a solution and has created a problem. I think in the twelve months before Prime Minister Rudd changed the policy they'd been three boat arrivals with twenty five people. Since then there's been more than seventy illegal boat arrivals and more than three thousand people.

We've now got the situation where Christmas Island is full to overflowing; unauthorised arrivals are being brought to the mainland where they have access to the court system. We've got the case where it's reported today four of the *Oceanic Viking* people are in ASIO's opinion serious security risks. This is a problem of Kevin Rudd's making now it's not an easy one to fix. It took John Howard a couple of years to get it under control and this is why its such a tragedy that Kevin Rudd has squandered all that good work just so that he could proclaim his compassion credentials to the world but what's compassionate about restarting the people smuggling trade with all the risks involved.

CALLER:

Yes, I agree Tony. So if you win the election, I imagine that you will try and reverse it and go back to John Howard was doing?

TONY ABBOTT:

Essentially, yes. Obviously some things have moved on and it's impossible to have exactly the same policies because the circumstances have changed a little but certainly we'll be working closely with the source countries, we won't be engaging in the kind of grand standing and megaphone diplomacy that Kevin Rudd has. There will be a rigorous offshore processing policy, people won't be brought to the mainland, we will have temporary visas so that people won't think that getting here allows them the great prize of permanent residency, and where necessary and appropriate we'll be prepared to turn boats around. And I think if you've got those four elements in place you can start to make a difference.

CALLER:

Okay, thanks very much Tony.

TONY ABBOTT:

Thanks Julie.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Just while we are on this issue of an optimum population if you like, ultimately we were told we were headed for 28 million, just recently we've been told now 'oh no we are going to have 35 million'. Can we one day look at having a review of what would be the appropriate total population of this country should and can be, a sustainable population?

TONY ABBOTT:

That's a good question John. I mean, it was in fact Prime Minister Rudd who just glibly announced the other day that he wanted us to have 35 million people by I think 2050. Look, in the end the number of people we have is a function of two things. First, the birth rate and that's a private decision and, second, the immigration program and as long as the Government has an immigration program which is fairly and squarely in Australia's national interests, I think that's a good thing.

We should never underestimate the power of technology to cope with changes and I'm confident that Australians can adapt but I do think people get concerned when the Prime Minister just glibly announced that the population will increase by fifty per cent within a couple of decades, when they know the infrastructure pressures we've got right now and which the state governments aren't doing much to cope with.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Do you have a greater faith in the ability of technology to cope with the effects of global warming than the current Prime Minister?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, I think that technology is a vital part of the answers to this issue. For instance, I was at James Cook University in Townsville on my last trip to North Queensland and I saw the pilot project there to turn carbon dioxide and waste water from power stations into algae, which is then used to create stock feed and bio-diesel. Now I think this is a far more innovative way of dealing with carbon dioxide than just burying the stuff and yes I think technology can't provide us with all the answers but it can provide us with a lot of the answers.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

We've got Colin on the line now at Edmonton.

CALLER:

Good morning Tony and Warren and John. I just want to congratulate Warren for starters for having the courage to actually speak about the turtles and dugong issue this morning on the radio. Unlike our local member Scooter Mumbles Turnour who's trying to turn it in to a racial issue. I just want to congratulate you Warren, you had the courage to come out in the radio and say it how it is mate.

WARREN ENTSCH:

Well, I told you Col that I am committed mate. Absolutely committed to the cause.

CALLER:

Well you convinced me of that this morning. I am absolutely wrapped you said that Tony was sitting opposite you there with his ears pricked. I would like to hear his view on what he thinks about the inhumane and the uncontrolled killing of turtles and dugongs in green zones in front of international tourists. Throwing them on the fire live, cutting their flippers off over days, stuffing paper down the dugong's airholes and letting them die over days.

TONY ABBOTT:

It's a horrible business and, a, it's inhumane and, b, it's contributing to the endangered status of these beautiful animals. So I am instinctively strongly opposed to this exploitation and Warren is certainly across the detail of the issue and I'll be talking with Warren so that between now and the election we can come up with some specific ways to help get on top of this problem.

CALLER:

I've been working with Greg Hunt and with Warren and I'm really excited about people willing to come out in public and not turn it into a racial issue, because it's nothing to do with race whatsoever. And I think that every Australian that's listening to the radio and reads in print and I got a fair bit of play in the *Herald Sun* down there over the whale issue. Why are we so up in arms about the killing eight or nine hundred whales a year by the Japanese who claim it's a cultural issue and yet we allow 365 days of the year to murder a turtle and a dugong under the guise of cultural significance? Isn't this hypocrisy of the highest level? I've never even seen one in the wild. I just think that we've had such double standards here in Australia that we are so against the Japanese for doing that – and I'm not saying that the killing of whales is okay, too – but, why is it okay for our indigenous people to do it and other indigenous countries not do it?

WARREN ENTSCH:

Colin, I was up in the Tablelands up at Yungaburra on Saturday. I was asked to have a look at a fruit bat colony that had moved there after Cyclone Larry. They were living in people's backyards and the stench was absolutely unbelievable, there was dead and decaying animals there. This is right in people's backyards, destroying the trees that had been planted by some tree conservation group a few years before and they even had to disconnect their water tanks because of the flying foxes' droppings on the roof which had likely to cause a health problem for the residents, yet if those residents were to walk in there and try and chase the flying foxes or make a noise to disturb them, they could face up to a \$10,000 fine.

Now, I mean, it's all very well to protect the flying fox and you see all these green groups running out there protecting it, as they did with the Coral Sea, racing out there to protect the Coral Sea, as you've got them down there protecting the whales, but you never see one of them, not one of – or the government agencies – making a whisper, as I said early on, about turtles and dugongs and the way in which they are totally taken in a way, as you've described, that is quite horrific.

So, these are the issues that I'm raising with Tony and I'm hoping that when Greg comes up here – I think he's up in March – we'll be organising to meet with some of the senior traditional owners, the elders, to develop a policy arrangement there which I had started when I had been the local member and Greg will be taking that and Tony has given a strong indication that he'll look at it very, very closely. He won't hide under a rock on this issue. He will be upfront in making sure that we have appropriate policy to stop this sort of nonsense.

CALLER:

That's music to our ears, and John too. We've been battling this for months and months and months with no help from the local member. I called to question him on it and he turned it into a racial issue straight away. He's done it with myself, he's rung me from Parliament and asked me what I'm all on about, instead of getting on the radio and telling people why that he does nothing about it whatsoever. I had a hand in getting him elected. I hope that every Labor voter votes for Warren Entsch at the next election and gets rid of Jimmy Turnour. I had a great hand in convincing people to give him a go, and we've given him a go and he's a fool. They laughed at him on the last day in Parliament – I was watching you, Tony – I was watching the rest of them there. He got up to ask a question and the whole Parliament laughed at him. Now, if we want someone down there in Parliament that people are going to laugh at, how are we going to get anything changed? Now, Warren, you've had plenty of experience, you're across the issue, you're the disgruntled Labor voter's person of choice. Please keep it up.

WARREN ENTSCH:

We're going to have a coffee soon, brother.

TONY ABBOTT:

Well said, Colin.

CALLER:

Okay. And I like the way you operate too, Tony. You wear your heart on your sleeve. You don't beat around the bush. And I'm happy you got rid of Turnbull because he just turned into another Rudd and I couldn't believe that he was going to support that Copenhagen thing – that's just a joke.

TONY ABBOTT:

Thanks, Colin. And look I want to be the disgruntled Labor voter's Opposition Leader of choice as well.

CALLER:

And you know, I'm disgruntled as well. You know me from back at ADI in Victoria. You know what I do. I tell you what, I'm begging people to vote for Warren Entsch in and get rid of Jimmy.

TONY ABBOTT:

And look a lot of fair dinkum working people are pretty unhappy with the Rudd Government.

CALLER:

A lot of them are, mate. You're on the right path.

TONY ABBOTT:

Thanks so much.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

We've got Mike on the line. Mike, you're talking to the Opposition Leader and Warren Entsch.

CALLER:

G'day Tony, how's it going?

TONY ABBOTT:

G'day Mike, I'm good.

CALLER:

I've got two questions for you. One saying would you sell any more mines to China and what are you going to do about our economic dependency on China as such.

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, look, I'm perfectly happy to do business with China provided it's in Australia's national interest. I mean if we can make a dollar selling stuff to them, if buying stuff from them can help us, I'm all in favour of that. What I don't want to do, though, is sell out our national interest to anyone. I'm not in favour of nationalisation of our industries. I normally wouldn't want to see the Australian Government buying productive industries or productive businesses and therefore I have significant concerns about a foreign government regardless of the nationality that is trying to take stakes in Australian businesses or Australian industries. So, I think we've got to be balanced about it. I think we've got to be reasonable about it, but above all else I think we've got to ruthlessly pursue our own national interests here.

CALLER:

Yeah, in the long run, I think, because in the long run I don't think it's in our interests if we held too many of our mines and that to foreign countries or companies as such... not in our interest, I think.

TONY ABBOTT:

That's true. On the other hand, if we need the dough and they're prepared to give us good money for something and it's not something that's absolutely vital, well then I think we've got to be prepared to have a good look at that as well. So again, Australia's national interest comes first here and that's got to be the test.

CALLER:

Yeah and that's basically my point. I mean, if you sell them too many mines they will basically set the prices and the working conditions. I don't think that's in Australia's interest in the long run. That's the bottom line... companies, eventually they will set the conditions and that'll be to our detriment.

TONY ABBOTT:

And this is why – to his great credit – my predecessor Malcolm Turnbull said that he would oppose the Chinese bid to have what was a very big stake in Rio Tinto given Rio Tinto's position in the Australian mining and minerals sector.

CALLER:

Yeah. So you will pursue that policy of basically keeping the mining sector in Australian hands and following up Australia's interests and making sure in the long run that we'll keep control of things and working conditions

TONY ABBOTT:

It's got to be Australia that comes first. Thanks Mike.

CALLER:

Yeah, no worries.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Thanks Mike. And sadly Tony, we're getting a big wind-up out there. You've got to go and catch a plane apparently. You're running late. Just before you go, I was just going through the CV a few minutes ago. There's rather a illogical step in the middle of this. It lists Rhodes Scholar, journalist, press secretary, political advisor to John Hewson, Executive Director, Australians for Constitutional Monarchy and plant manager, Pioneer Concrete?

TONY ABBOTT:

Yeah, that's right. I thought that the steel should enter my soul at one stage there, John.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

But how did this happen?

TONY ABBOTT:

I had just gone thirty. I'd spent my whole life basically in universities or around newspapers or magazines.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Or boxing rings?

TONY ABBOTT:

Yeah, yeah but that was different, that was university rugby union fields with a whole lot of layabout students...

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Aboriginal communities...

TONY ABBOTT:

That's later, John. And I figured I needed a bit of real world experience and I used to be quite good mates in those days with a bloke called Sir Tristan Antico who ran Pioneer Concrete and I ran into him one day and I said, 'look, Sir Tris, would it be possible for a guy at my stage of life to come and experience a bit of the real world?' And he says 'well if you want to, you can become a manager of a batching plant', so I did that for twelve months. It was a fascinating time.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Did you do a bit of trowelling?

TONY ABBOTT:

No, we were mixing the concrete, so I was getting the sand, the gravel, the cement, the water, getting it into the trucks in the right quantities and then getting the trucks out of the door to deliver it to the site. You see, you need people with real world experience in the parliament. Warren Entsch has been a crocodile shooter, a cattle farmer, a trade union organiser – that’s the real world. I haven’t had as much real world experience as Warren, but I have had a bit and the batching plant for Pioneer Concrete is part of it.

JOHN MACKENZIE:

Tony, it has been a great pleasure today. Can you come back with a different PA that’s not so strict so you can carry on a bit longer next time?

TONY ABBOTT:

She’s one stroppy gal...

JOHN MACKENZIE:

This has been a pleasure today. Thanks for coming up. And continue this relationship, this discourse with the people of North Queensland. It’s greatly appreciated and I hope it doesn’t come to an end anywhere in the near future. Thank you.

TONY ABBOTT:

Thanks, John. Thank you.

[ends]