

## Prime Minister of Australia

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### Interview

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Transcript of Press Conference  
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**Subject(s):** *President Obama; Australian Labor Party; RSPT*

PM: Good morning and given it's a cold Canberra morning and I think you are standing in the rain we'll get on straight with the job. Today obviously is my first day as Prime Minister. Today I will conduct the first Cabinet meeting of the Gillard Government. Whilst of course I will not be discussing in detail matters that are to be dealt with by Cabinet, the purpose of today's Cabinet meeting is to be discussing the changes we will make to get the Government back on track.

In addition to today's Cabinet meeting I am of course speak to world leaders to introduce myself as the new Australian Prime Minister.

This morning I have already had the great honour and privilege of speaking with President Obama. I spoke to President Obama and spoke about the strong friendship between our two nations, the strong and enduring friendship and alliance between Australians and Americans. We are close as nations, we are in an enduring strategic alliance, we are close as people. We have fought together around the world and we continue to fight together in Afghanistan.

I assured President Obama that my approach to Afghanistan will continue the approach taken to date by the Australian Government. I fully support the current deployment and I indicated to President Obama that he should expect to see the Australian effort in Afghanistan continuing. We spoke about, of course, the cost that this causes to our nations, we have seen the loss of life of Australian soldiers, obviously too President Obama in his nation have families who grieve for those who have been lost in Afghanistan, but our determination to continue the deployment continues.

I also recorded my apologies for not attending the G20 in Toronto. President Obama understood that given events here in Australia I would not be able to attend. Wayne Swan is attending the G20 meeting on my behalf and will shortly leave Australia to go to Toronto for that very important meeting.

I assured President Obama that any time he chooses to travel to Australia he will be very, very welcome indeed. Welcomed by the Australian Government but even more importantly welcomed by the Australian people. I would imagine a visit by President Obama would be greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm by Australians. He indicated that he would very much like to travel to Australia, he regrets that he has not been able to travel here to date, he advised me that he has got such fond memories of this country from coming here particularly as an eight year old when he travelled unaccompanied to this nation, he has strong and fond memories, particularly of Sydney.

During the course of today I will also speak to the President of Indonesia, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Prime Minister of Canada and to him I will convey directly my apologies for not attending the G20 meeting and the Prime Minister of Britain. I had the opportunity yesterday to speak briefly to the Prime Minister of New Zealand, we are obviously very close as nations except when we are engaged in combat on the sporting field and he offered his congratulations on my appointment as Prime Minister. I of course have met him before.

So the Government is down to business, it's pressing ahead with the hard work and the changes that we need to make to get the Government back on track.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister Gillard, what would you say to the thousands of people who are flooding our emails with angry comments about the manner in which you were appointed Prime Minister and is this the nature of politics now? And won't those same factional warlords come after you with knives if you don't turn the polls around and win the election?

PM: Well there are several assumptions in those questions so I'll try and unpack those assumptions. I offered myself for consideration by the Labor Party to become its leader and to become Prime Minister because of the obligation I felt to hard working Australians. The only judgement that ultimately matters to me, the people that I seek serve, are those hard working Australians who rely on decent government services and rely on having a job and decent rights at work.

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I understand that Australians watching the events of yesterday would have seen the hurt felt by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Leading the nation, Government, is about the national interest, it's about the affairs of the nation, but it's also a job undertaken by flesh and blood human beings who have emotions, who have feelings, who feel hurt and exhibit pain and obviously yesterday was a very, very difficult day for Kevin Rudd, for this family, for his friends and for many, many others. But I took a decision because I believe it was in the best interests of the Australian people for the Government to get back on track and that is what I am determined to do.

I'll go Matthew and then Dennis.

JOURNALIST: With regards to the RSPT, yesterday in Question Time I think you were asked three times to commit as to whether you expect it would raise the \$12 billion that was planned under the design. You didn't answer that, so is it fair for people to assume that you are now working on, in you negotiations with the mining industry, to are prepared to accept less revenue to find a deal, a situation, that is acceptable to industry and also gives Australians a greater share of mineral resources.

PM: What people should assume is that I will do what I said I would do yesterday, and that is we will genuinely negotiate with the mining industry. So that those genuine negotiations can start I have met this morning with Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer Wayne Swan and with the relevant Minister Martin Ferguson to work on the Government's negotiating strategy.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what other areas are you looking at changing in the broad, and have you spoken to Mr Rudd and is he in the Cabinet meeting today?

PM: I have not personally spoken to Mr Rudd, I will of course be speaking to Mr Rudd in the time period to come. Consequently Mr Rudd, we haven't made new ministerial arrangements so obviously the Cabinet that is meeting today is the continuing Cabinet of the Government.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible) Mr Rudd and also what the decision with Lindsay Tanner, will he be Finance Minister to the election or not?

PM: Well obviously former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is no longer Prime Minister, he's surrendered his commission as Prime Minister and I have been appointed Prime Minister. On that basis of course, Kevin Rudd will not be in today's Cabinet meeting. We will make new ministerial arrangements, I am working on those arrangements now and I will announce them in due course.

If I can say a word about Lindsay Tanner. I was not aware until Lindsay came to see me yesterday that it had been his intention to leave the Australian Parliament at the forthcoming election. As I indicated in the Parliament yesterday, I know Lindsay Tanner all of my adult life, he's done a fantastic job as Finance Minister, I will be talking to him as I strike the new ministerial arrangements, I'll advise of them in due course and we will work on them carefully. The ministerial arrangements are my decision but I will obviously consult with my colleagues before I make the decision, including consulting directly with Kevin Rudd about his future.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister (inaudible) priority for you in getting the Government back on track?

PM: My priority as we look through the issues of the Government is to make sure that in every area we are working hard for Australian families, we are working hard for those Australians who work hard themselves; who set the alarm clock early, who get up in the morning, get the kids to school and go to work and work hard. I want to make sure that we are working with them. I obviously have become concerned that there are a set of issues where the Government needs to better engage and better manage in the Australian interest.

The mining tax question is clearly one of those and I've indicated my intentions and we have already taken a major step forward in getting good will into the conversation with both our ads and the mining industry ads being taken down. I think that that is progress.

We'll continue to make progress in other areas that concern Australians. I'm doing to do this a step at a time, I'm going to do it methodically and I'm obviously going to make announcements to Australians about what the Government is doing to get back on track.

Patricia.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, the ultimate of mining requirement when you seek a consensus. Following on from Dennis' question, what other areas do you think the Government needs to change positions?

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: I thought Dennis was going to answer the question then, he loomed over your shoulder and I thought he was starting a sentence but nothing else came out - very distracting.

My priority obviously is to ensure that we deal with the question of the mining tax. It has caused uncertainty, I think that uncertainty has caused anxiety for Australians. I want to make sure Australians get a fair share of our mineral wealth but we want to genuinely negotiate so on my first morning of my first full day as Prime Minister a priority has been sitting with Deputy Prime Minister Wayne Swan and with the Minister for Resources Martin Ferguson to work on the Governments negotiating strategy.

I obviously believe Australians want to hear us speak too on what we are doing now to deal with climate change and we will do that. But they want to hear what we are doing to manage our borders and I will be speaking about that in the future, but broadly across the area of Government I will be going through and making sure that we are delivering what is incumbent upon us to deliver and that is the services and assistance that working families need and expect from Government. They expect the Government to lead a strong economy, to make sure that they've got the benefits and the dignity of work. They expect the Government to be delivering quality education, they expect the Government to be working with them to meet their health care needs and of course, they expect the Government to be doing those things that are necessary to prepare for the future including tackling the challenge of climate change.

We'll go over to Andrew, then to Malcolm and back through.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, just get back on leadership and the circumstances in which you've got it, would it be fair for the public to think that the leadership of the Labor Party is only secure as long as you're popular and does that mean that therefore that you will only go for timid reforms?

PM: Well both of those things would not be true to conclude, not true to conclude at all. I was motivated to step forward for this position as Prime Minister because I thought a good Government had lost its way. What concerned me was the national interest and governing in the interests of hardworking Australians. And what also concerned me is that I thought I had an obligation to make sure, at the next election, that we did everything we could to prevent this nation going back, back to the days of Work Choices, back to the days of cutbacks in health, back to the days of indifference on education and what needs to be done to make sure that every Australian child gets a fair chance at a great life. That is what has motivated me to step forward and take this position.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, the Australian Worker's Union and various MPs of its patronage made a lot of noise about opposing Kevin Rudd and backing you in as the next Prime Minister. Whether you like it or not, aren't you now part of that patronage?

PM: I think that that's a curious assumption indeed, if I can say that to you Malcolm the only thing that ultimately matters in the position of Prime Minister, the constituency that matters is the hardworking Australians around this nation. And of course I can understand that the Opposition and others will try and put a character in the events of recent days, I understand that, but I also believe, standing particularly in this place with the people who are here today, that across my life in politics since I was first elected in 1998, people would say the following things about me. It is completely absurd for anybody to look at track record in this place and to conclude anything other than that I have made my own decisions, I am a person of strong mind and I made my own decisions.

The other thing it would be completely absurd to conclude is that I am not prepared to stump up to hard reform, and I would refer people to my track record as Deputy Prime Minister, a record of reform. A record of reform like getting rid of Work Choices and introducing the Fair Work system with a Senate in which we did not hold the majority.

Reforms like getting national health and safety laws for this country, something bureaucrats had been working on for 25 years. On the day that that went through the ministerial council some of them cried, they had been working so long to get that reform and we did it.

Reforms like national curriculum that the country has been talking about for two decades, politicians came and went and talked about national curriculum, no one got anything done of substance until I stumped up and drove that reform.

Reforms like the My School website, once again, chat about transparency very fashionable, getting it done very hard and I have got it done. So on a track record of hard reform, difficult reform, contested reform, I think my track record speaks for itself.

Paul Bongiorno?

JOURNALIST: Thank you very much, Prime Minister. Aren't you at all concerned that you have a record of being prepared to waste money as the Opposition accuses you of especially with the building of the Education Revolution. How are you going to address that perception if it's not a reality?

Well we have worked through the Building the Education Revolution. I obviously want to see value for money, I've made that clear. And consequently I've taken a series of steps to make sure that we are getting value for money. The creation of the Building the Education Revolution taskforce was a big step led by an Australian business person Brad Orgill with all of that commercial expertise. And then relying on his advice, we are withholding some payments to New South Wales to drive some of the changes we believe are needed for some of the schools in that state. These are appropriate steps to make sure that we get value for money.

Katharine?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, there is a lot of criticism under Kevin Rudd obviously about his top down leadership style, about lines being issued centrally, about Cabinet ministers being neutered and not able to carve out their own political identities and put their own positions forward. How would you foreshadow your own leadership style? Are you more relaxed about your colleague around the Cabinet table having opinions that they are able to express publicly and prosecute publicly? Or are you more inclined to put a premium on discipline and on central messaging which was really the whole mark of Kevin Rudd's leadership. How would you describe your own attitude to those things?

PM: Okay there's no truth in the rumour that I'm prioritising redheads in the press pack, I don't want that to take hold. My style is this and will be. I believe that you get the best from people if you have them work as a team. I believe we're all strengthened if we work as members of a team. I believe the office of Prime Minister is there to focus on and to drive the strategic questions that confront this nation.

I trust Ministers to get on with the job in their portfolio. I will obviously work with them side by side on the strategic questions that confront the nation and confront them in their portfolios. I intend to run a straight Cabinet system of Government. I intend to rely on my colleagues to come to the Cabinet table with the best of their advice, with the best of their intelligence and the best of their labours as we work together to get the Government back on track.

I think as people have looked at the things I have done in public life and indeed even before I was in public life, I am someone who wants to work with the team; who wants to be there with a team. You have in your question created what I think is a false divide, between teamwork and discipline, I see no such divide. I actually think that the best discipline is obtained when people work together and work together well. I think that holds true from the top echelons of the national government to local football teams. The best way of making sure that everybody works together is to make sure that they all see a place in the team. That they are there being treated respectfully, their ideas appreciated, their labours understood; and that is the approach that I will take.

JOURNALIST: On a personal level, you've been talking to world leaders, you're about to chair a Cabinet meeting, has it sunk in as to exactly that you're Prime Minister? When and what did you do last night? Any celebrations?

PM: Well, I think obviously in some ways the weight of it has sunk in. I think for some of the more personal reflections that will probably have to wait to a time when I've got the time to take a moment for the more personal reflections. On what I did last night, I worked here in this building including a series of interviews ending with an interview with a very famous redhead Kerry O'Brien. I then went home and ate some takeaway food with my partner Tim and with a few friends who were in Canberra. I've been back here in Parliament House since early this morning.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Right. Okay, so you've obviously been speaking to my Aunt Millie, is that right? Aunt Millie who still lives in Cwmgrach which is the mining village from which my father is from. My father is here, obviously, alive and well in Australia. They breed them tough, the Gillards, they breed them tough. He is one of seven, he is the second youngest and most of his brothers and sisters are still alive. Most of his brothers and sisters stayed in the mining village in Cwmgrach and either went mining or married miners. Aunt Millie is telling a story about when our ship pulled up in Australia I dropped a koala bear that they'd given all the kids as a welcome present to Australia and I hear I dropped it over the side, accidentally. Aunt Millie's recollection is not quite right, in fact as my mother has recounted to me on many occasions, a very heroic officer on the ship actually went and somehow delve to where it had fallen between the ship and the pier and got it back out for me and gave me back the bear.

JOURNALIST: You clearly met Bill Shorten before the events of Wednesday night. At any point did you go to Kevin Rudd to seek an alternative to change the direction of the government without necessarily causing a spill? Why was there no alternative to a change in leader? What had Kevin Rudd done wrong?

PM: Look, I talked to many of my colleagues, and obviously my colleagues formed the same view I did that it was necessary in order to get the Government back on track that a good Government had lost its way. It was necessary to get the Government back on track with me as Prime Minister. That was obviously a view formed broadly and deeply by my caucus colleagues. Not unanimously, I certainly don't say that, but broadly and deeply, by my Cabinet colleagues.

I am not, today or on any other day, going to go through the details of conversations I had with Kevin Rudd, either in the lead up to yesterday's events or conversations we had when he was Prime Minister and I was Deputy Prime Minister. I think that would be improper.

But what I will say is this. Obviously I formed a view about the future of the Government, about the future of the national interest, I am a person who is frank and obviously I discussed that view within the government but I am not going to canvass the details of conversations with a former Prime Minister.

JOURNALIST: Were you really upset about that article in the Herald? Those that installed you said it was the catalyst.

PM: As author of the article, you and Peter I think, you may have interest in saying something flamboyant or dramatic about it. I am afraid I am going to deny you that. The decisions I have made this week have been decisions about profound matters of national interest. They have weighed heavily on me. They were not easy decisions. I have taken them because I thought they were the right thing to do. I've not taken them because of any newspaper report.

JOURNALIST: How do you feel personally about the 40 per cent rate? Kevin Rudd used to say it was about right. What's your personal view as to those issues in the mining tax?

PM: Well, the Government is going to and I've been working on this today, the Government is going to have a negotiating strategy here. What I've said, my previous position, I've indicated it strongly yesterday, I'm indicating it again strongly today is that we need to harness the goodwill that has been generated within the mining industry and build on it in the national interest. We will work through that, with the negotiating strategy, we'll do that in a careful way. As those negotiations take shape and I'm in a position to report the Australian nation about what is coming through from those negotiations I'll do so.

JOURNALIST: So as the Prime Minister, do you commit to resolving those issues on the mining tax before calling an election?

PM: We will work through. Obviously, when you're negotiating, there's more than you in the room and so the attitude of others is important to this. My view is that this task needs to be undertaken as quickly as possible. We need to work through with goodwill and we will.

JOURNALIST: Do you have any advice from the federal police as to whether you can actually stay in your flat?

PM: No I haven't. No I've haven't.

JOURNALIST: (Inaudible) What are your foreign policy priorities?

PM: Well obviously, I believe speaking to President Obama today was very important. The calls that I am making now are introductory calls. In terms of our near neighbours, obviously discussions particularly discussions about people movement are important and they will be a priority.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible) Which particular marginal areas will you be targeting when you do go out?

PM: I will engage in a balance. I think it's important to be out there talking to the Australian people. But I also think it's important in coming days that I am here for long periods of time in Canberra. We need to get the government back on track, to do that we need to step by step take a series of decisions and that is bets done while I am here in Canberra. Okay, thank you very much.

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