



**PAUL FLETCHER MP
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MINISTER FOR URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND CITIES
09 April 2018**

TRANSCRIPT – ABC RADIO SYDNEY DRIVE WITH RICHARD GLOVER

Topics: *Newspoll; Circular Quay development; changing nature of art; live export trade*

RICHARD GLOVER: Monday political forum. Paul Fletcher is the Minister for Urban Infrastructure. He's the MP for Bradfield. So, if you live in places like Turrumurra, Pymble, Lindfield, if the council don't pick up the bins, please complain to him. I'm sure he'll come round and do it. Tim Williams, the cities leader now for the design firm Arup. He used to be the boss of the Committee for Sydney. And the writer and public education activist Jane Caro. Good afternoon.

JANE CARO: Hello.

RICHARD GLOVER: Thank you for coming in. Now, let's do the 30 Newspolls. Of course, the Prime Minister is said to have failed according to his own benchmark, in that he has today lost 30 Newspolls in a row. Is it a significant marker and is there any public hunger for change at the top, Paul Fletcher?

PAUL FLETCHER: Well, there's certainly- I don't perceive any public hunger for change at the top, and nor in the party room, I might say. Look, the Prime Minister said, when he was challenging for the leadership, that he wanted to restore good cabinet government. He's done that. He wanted to provide strong economic leadership. He's done that over 420,000 new jobs created in the last 12 months. He also referred to 30 Newspolls. He subsequently said that he regrets having done that. But I don't think it's something that most Australians are all that concerned about. What they're concerned about is jobs, the future for them and their children; whether we're a high taxing or a low taxing country. Whether we're capturing free trade opportunities and the economic benefits that come with that. So, those are the things that we're focused on.

RICHARD GLOVER: Tim Williams, it is true, despite we in the media going on about the 30 Newspolls, it was one thing on a whole list of reasons that he thought he was right to topple Mr Abbott.

TIM WILLIAMS: Yeah, it's interesting. We are only talking about it because he himself gave us that number to focus on and we've been obsessively thinking about that number for him. I think the second thing, though, is the bit that's been missed is that having now gone through the 30 and nothing happened to him, the monkey's been lifted off his back in quite a big way, I think.

RICHARD GLOVER: Oh, okay.

TIM WILLIAMS: I think- you know, that was then and this is now. You know?

RICHARD GLOVER: So that's- well, yesterday's story soon.

TIM WILLIAMS: It's gone. I mean, he's got it off his back and I think it will never return. Because 31, 32, you know? [Indistinct] we've done that one.

RICHARD GLOVER: Doesn't have the same ring. Jane Caro, do you agree?

JANE CARO: Not really. I think the thing is that he's been hoisted by his own petard, tragically, and people can't resist making a bit of a thing about that and I can't blame them.

RICHARD GLOVER: Well, no one wants a change of Prime Minister. People either say: I hate him and I want to remove him myself or they say I love him and leave him in there.

JANE CARO: I completely agree with you. They do not want to see a change of the leadership of the Liberal National Party at this time and the Prime Minister being deposed and somebody else brought in. I think, however, we have to recognise that if it's 30 Newspolls for Malcolm and 30 Newspolls for Tony, then it's the Liberal National Party that may have the problem, rather than the leaders of the Liberal National Party, as far as electors are concerned. And I think, therefore, that people- and I mean the polls are saying exactly this, this is why these numbers are not moving and haven't really moved apart from one election where he won by one seat, much at all, is because they are dissatisfied with the kind of government that they're being given.

RICHARD GLOVER: Okay. He's still ahead of Bill Shorten as preferred leader though.

JANE CARO: Yes, but I don't think that it's about leadership. That's the point. I think it's actually about the kinds of policies and the way that people feel they're being spoken to by their current government. People don't vote people into power anymore, they vote people out of power, and so I think Malcolm Turnbull's problem is he came in and I think a lot of people had probably too high expectations, and that is always a bad place for a leader to start. If people have expectations of you, it's highly likely you're going to disappoint them. Bill Shorten may be in a really good position. No one has many expectations of him. If he, as the Newspolls would currently seem to indicate, wins the next election, he may in fact be in a much better position because people's expectations are more realistic.

RICHARD GLOVER: Paul. Jane's essentially saying the Labor policy - and we've heard a lot of them on negative gearing and all sorts of things - they're chiming with the public mood better than the government's.

PAUL FLETCHER: Well, I think that would be too much of a read. At the end of the day, in the time-honoured political cliché, there's only one poll that counts. And we have seen just recently in South Australia, we saw the polls predicting that Nick Xenophon was going to win quite a number of seats. He was likely to end up as Premier of South Australia. In the result, didn't win any seats, not in the parliament. So, there is a big disconnect between polls and the final outcome. That's what matters. But what I would say is, look, Malcolm Turnbull is not a commentator on politics. I'm not a commentator on politics. The Turnbull Government, we're not commentators. What we're doing is getting on with delivering strong employment growth and the other things that people expect of us.

RICHARD GLOVER: Paul Fletcher is here. So is Jane Caro and Tim Williams. Now, Circular Quay is Sydney's front door, and yet it's currently a real mess with ancient ferry wharves, tired buildings. No obvious encouragement for walkers to stroll to nearby attractions such as The Rocks and Botanic Gardens. Transport New South Wales is now gathering views about what should happen there. They've planned a big rebuild. But what should be our ambition. Tim Williams?

TIM WILLIAMS: Our ambition should be to- this is the gateway to the nation and we should design it as such. I remember being shocked when I first arrived because I love- the harbour's fantastic, and then you stand by Custom House and look back at the ocean, and I thought to myself: seven years ago when I came, am I supposed to be able to see the sea from this perspective?

RICHARD GLOVER: Because you can't.

TIM WILLIAMS: Because you can't.

RICHARD GLOVER: No.

TIM WILLIAMS: And I think it's what we did ...

RICHARD GLOVER: [Interrupts] You can see a fast food shop.

TIM WILLIAMS: You could see- you could wear Ugg boots and see nothing. You could buy great Ugg boots and see nothing else, right? But essentially this, everybody in the world did that to their harbour. There was a period when people turned their back on the water and the river. So, we're now turning our back- face to it. What are we going to do? And there's a good opportunity. Private sector's going stuff, as well as Transport for New South Wales. AMP has got some great stuff coming in. There's quite a lot going to happen there, right? The issue for me is to harvest and leverage all that for a great design. Let me give you one idea. What are we going to do about the Cahill Expressway? It's actually not- it's that fundamental.

RICHARD GLOVER: It's not named after the soccer player even though you want it to be.

TIM WILLIAMS: Is that right? But what are we going to do about it? And I think you could actually make it into Sydney's High Line. You could just make it into a walkway between Botanical Garden and [indistinct] ...

RICHARD GLOVER: [Interrupts] What are you going to with the cars? How are you going to get people to [indistinct]?

TIM WILLIAMS: It's actually- I mean, a lot of people have done studies about this stuff, but actually it's not that significant a use for the city. We can find ways around it. What is going to be difficult [indistinct] actually underground all of it, but actually I think what would be really good is to actually work out whether we can make kind of green infrastructure.

RICHARD GLOVER: [Interrupts] But there's also- it's not only the Cahill Expressway that stops you- that interface of the city. It's also the rail system. You can't move that can you?

TIM WILLIAMS: No, but you can- I think from this perspective, we can improve what we have along there. There's lots of money coming [indistinct]. Light rail is going to go along there. I do think there's an opportunity to improve it. I don't think we're ever going to get quite rid of my problem: why can't I see the sea from Custom House?

RICHARD GLOVER: And the other thing they've pointed out, I borrow this from Transport New South Wales, they say: you're not really encouraged to walk around and understand that – if you're a visitor – to understand that you can get to the Botanic Gardens really easily. You can get to The Rocks really easy by foot.

TIM WILLIAMS: Part of the problem has always been, I think, with the place, is that you've got five or six, maybe more, different agencies who've got responsibilities for different [indistinct], right? I think we maybe have an opportunity for the first time in this experience to bring them all together to say: what's the master plan [indistinct]?

RICHARD GLOVER: Mind you, I think Eddie Obeid tried to bring them all together.

[Laughter]

TIM WILLIAMS: That was- yeah, that ended well, I think is the word.

RICHARD GLOVER: Paul Fletcher, you're responsible for urban infrastructure – what do you think should happen there?

PAUL FLETCHER: Well look, I think the Berejiklian government is very much on the right track here in looking in how that area can be revitalised and I think if you look around other parts of Sydney, we've seen some terrific examples. Barangaroo, for example, has really reenergised a part of the city that was essentially off limits for most of us. Now it's a very vibrant area. And of course, there's a series of ferry wharves there, which are very successful, and of course, terrific urban activation.

RICHARD GLOVER: It is very attractive if people haven't been there. It's really- and I know there's controversy about the amount of development there, but the actual landscaping, it's very attractive.

PAUL FLETCHER: It's very attractive and it's very clever. A lot of really good design thinking has gone into it, including into the mix of restaurants and cafes and so on at ground level, and also the laneways and the pedestrian- encouragement of pedestrian activity. So, I think there's certainly an opportunity to do a similar thing at Circular Quay. I think the important thing is to have the right process, to capture the best ideas and come up with a design which lives up to the potential of what is an extraordinary and iconic site.

RICHARD GLOVER: Jane, you're in charge of the development, what are you going to do?

JANE CARO: Knock down the Cahill Expressway, though I do like the High Line idea. I think that's quite a nice idea. I worked in the old Unilever House in my first job out of uni – 1978, '79 – I would think, and it looked exactly then like it looks now. I think the same greasy spoon restaurants were everywhere. It is so fundamentally tacky, and not tacky in a charming way at all, but just tacky tacky. And it is so sad because, as Tim says, it is the gateway to one of the most beautiful cities in the world and it's as if- somebody described the difference between Melbourne and Sydney to me once and I thought it was brilliant. They said that Melbourne is like a very plain woman who absolutely makes the best of herself and Sydney is like a beautiful woman who just doesn't care what she wears or what she looks like. She never bothers with makeup. And I thought; there's some truth in that. It's like we take our physical attractiveness for granted and we don't play it up. And gee, I'd love to see us do something with that area and make it inviting, as you say, and friendly to pedestrians.

RICHARD GLOVER: So you can see the sea as a [indistinct].

JANE CARO: Well, it would be nice to see that harbour that's right laid out in front of you if only you could get round the greasy spoons, yeah.

RICHARD GLOVER: Exactly. Alright. Monday political forum: Paul Fletcher, Jane Caro and Tim Williams. Now, the actor Molly Ringwald has written a piece for the *New Yorker*. We're in the wake of the #metoo movement. She analyses the teen films in which she starred. These are films like *The Breakfast Club*, all made by the late John Hughes. She finds things to admire, but also examples of sexism, racism, homophobia. Is it fair to reassess the art of the past using the values of today, as Molly's done, or is it useful to remind ourselves how much things have changed, Jane Caro?

JANE CARO: I think it's always fair enough to look at art in the context of the current times. And then, in fact, great art that lasts, you're able to do with- it's actually is able to illuminate the present as much as the past. Shakespeare, for example. And directors re-interpret constantly Shakespeare to say different things. I mean...

RICHARD GLOVER: Yeah, but Shakespeare's got anti-semitic thought in [indistinct], for instance.

JANE CARO: *The Taming of the Shrew* is one of the most problematic plays you can possibly think of, but it's getting produced with, say, all female cast, which suddenly make [indistinct] in a whole different way. So I think it's always legitimate to do that, and what I liked about Molly Ringwald's essay was that, in fact, she wasn't condemning John Hughes. It wasn't an angry, hateful essay; it was very thoughtful about how she herself has changed the way she looks at the world as a result of what's happened in the years between the making of those films and the person that she is now, and the way society has changed. And I think that's legit. I think you can't judge the people who made those films or made that art in the context of today, because we're all products of our time and we all hopefully grow and learn as we go through time. But I think you can judge the art itself, and you can talk about how it was made and what it says about then and what it says about now, and that's what art's for.

RICHARD GLOVER: Okay. Because, of course, people aren't saying don't watch this movie...

JANE CARO: No.

RICHARD GLOVER: ... or ban this movie. They're just saying: understand how it works and...

JANE CARO: Yeah. And look at it, maybe with a different lens now, because the way we look at those things has changed. That's the great thing about art. The day we say that art can only be judged in and of its time is the day we kill art.

RICHARD GLOVER: Tim Williams, is it fair enough for Molly to go back and look at these films and judge them through a lens of today?

TIM WILLIAMS: But that subjectivism means that in 10 years' time, we look at it differently again.

JANE CARO: Of course.

TIM WILLIAMS: So this is not a definitive position either, I think. And so I think that's worth understanding. This doesn't mean that we've learned something new about John Hughes. We'll learn something else about John Hughes in 10 years' time. The only funny thing about any of this - it's quite well written, quite balanced piece, it's not melodramatic, it's very interesting - is that actually, it reminds you that he's already [indistinct] writing comedy for National Lampoons. So he comes out of a slightly far worse background, and actually I think they're some quite thoughtful films about growing up. I wouldn't like to lose the fact in this critique that actually, they're quite intelligent films about being different and actually, quite a lot of gay people have said they've really found something in those films because it's about people who are different. I do think there's a permanent, unnecessary revisionism about art critique. Like, permanent revisionism. The truth is much clearer than the past when it comes to things like looking back on art. The difference, I think, is the interactive nature now that we can get the artists muse to say what she thought about the artist, whereas with Catullus, that's a bit more difficult. [Indistinct] died 2000 years ago. So you know, I think that- the boy in Caravaggio, we can't ask him whether he thinks he was sexually abused or not by that. Right? So, we're in a much more interactive era. But I think where- I go back to where I started, I think, which is that I think we're in a period of reflection, of inevitable reflection. My only worry about art in this- look what happened to Shakespeare in the 19th century, which he was burglarised because puritans couldn't bear the sexuality or the violence. And I'm just wondering whether we're in that kind of puritanical era again; not in any way dismissing the reality of sexual abuse, but the cultural response is to actually edit out and to try to [indistinct]...

RICHARD GLOVER: That's right. Geoffrey Robertson was on Fidler the other day, talking about the textbook he was given in New South Wales public school for Shakespeare and how in one of the Shakespeare plays, the rape - I think it was - was left out. But then- I think it was in *The Tempest*. And so then you therefore could not understand the whole- and he was sitting on a train. He told the story; sitting on the train, I think, with a student from Sydney Grammar or something and noticing that his text of *The Tempest* was longer than Geoffrey's. So, what was missing?

TIM WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think life isn't as redacted as some of these texts are going to be if we don't watch out. You know, i.e. the temptation at the moment, I think, is to try and tailor the art to the needs of the moment, whereas I think it's- I just want to say. I think it's really important to reflect on changing more [indistinct] and look backwards. That's inevitable, and I think it's quite a wise thing to do. But I think- I'm worried a bit that we'll end up kind of hugely censoring art [indistinct].

JANE CARO: I doubt we will, because I don't think that feminism is particularly puritanical. I think it's the opposite. But I do think that that's always been so. I remember at school going through *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* with a fine-tooth comb trying to find out where the sex scene was.

RICHARD GLOVER: They'd taken it out?

JANE CARO: No. Thomas Hardy never wrote it because at the period of time, it was too shocking. He was pushing the boundaries too far. So, we'll always have that ebbing and flowing in art.

RICHARD GLOVER: Yeah. Paul Fletcher?

PAUL FLETCHER: I do think there is a bit of a danger in judging works from an earlier period by the particular conventions of today, as to what is politically correct or not to say, and I think there's also potentially a tension between- on the one hand, a work which is descriptive of certain

behaviours and the assumption that it is necessarily approving or condoning or recommending those behaviours, and we certainly don't want an environment in which novelists or playwrights or filmmakers can't cover behaviour or write about or portray behaviour or conduct which they may themselves strongly disapprove of.

RICHARD GLOVER: That's right. By depicting him looking up her dress under the table, you're not necessarily saying that's good. You're just saying that's part of male behaviour in this school, in this time.

JANE CARO: And I don't think- I have not come across anyone who's trying to say: you can't write about those things. But even so, there will always be puritans, there will always be people who will want to criticise and shut things down. The point of the artist is to not be influenced by that. You must push against that. Just because someone doesn't like what you write doesn't mean you should stop writing.

RICHARD GLOVER: Nine to six is the time. We're with Paul Fletcher, Jane Caro and Tim Williams. The Agriculture Minister has described his outrage on being shown film – played to the public last night on *60 Minutes* – depicting the awful deaths of thousands of sheep in a live export consignment last year. Here's David Littleproud.

[Excerpt]

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: My mum and dad produced beef cattle, and I know that that's not how to treat animals. I mean, this is disgusting. It absolutely shocked me, and can I say thank you to that brave young man that came forward and showed that footage. And I need to make sure that there is an environment for more whistleblowers.

[End of excerpt]

RICHARD GLOVER: That's the Agriculture Minister. Is this a case of an industry that needs just a bit more oversight, or should Australians just say goodbye to this trade? Just quickly, now. Paul Fletcher.

PAUL FLETCHER: Well, look, I certainly don't think Australians should say goodbye to this trade because it is a significant export industry for Australia, and of course, a lot of farmers supply into this trade. But as you heard very clearly from Minister David Littleproud, he is determined to make sure that the standards that we are committed to as a nation when it comes to animal welfare are upheld in the live export trade. He's announced a review of the independent regulator, the Department of Agriculture. He's announced an intention to legislate stronger penalties. So it is important, in my view, that we maintain this trade, but you've heard a very clear indication from the minister of a determination that the standards that we require in Australia are upheld throughout the live export [indistinct].

RICHARD GLOVER: Is that fair enough, Jane Caro?

JANE CARO: Well, my husband and I are actually beef producers. Now, we don't export live at all, and I think this is just shocking, what's happened to these animals. And I do think we need to look very carefully at the live export trade from Australia and we need to do something obviously about the governance of that. But we've heard this before: oh, we've got to do something. And then it happens again. The tragedy, of course, is it's a double-edged problem, because one of the things that is difficult is poverty in other parts of the world dictates that refrigeration – which we just

accept as, you know, across the board – is not available there, and one of the ways you can keep meat fresh if you aren't selling to someone with refrigeration is to keep the animals alive.

RICHARD GLOVER: Because [indistinct] a lot of people saying that's only about religion. But Brett Worthington was explaining earlier, you know, you live in a village in Indonesia, the only way to get the meat there is alive.

JANE CARO: Correct. It's not about religion primarily at all, but I still think that the welfare of these animals and the way they're treated is making this export trade more and more tenuous and we have either got to get serious about making it kind or give it away.

RICHARD GLOVER: So, just quickly. Tim Williams?

TIM WILLIAMS: I'm just shocked that- I've been here eight years. This is the second time this story has happened. I thought we sorted it four or five years ago, so clearly, we hadn't. But I'm hoping a politician will do something about it this time.

RICHARD GLOVER: Well, he sounds sincere, doesn't he? We'll have to keep our eyes on him and make sure something's done. We're out of time, but thank you to Paul Fletcher. He's the Minister for Urban Infrastructure and MP for Bradfield. Writer and public education activist, Jane Caro, and Tim Williams is now at Arup. Thank you so much.

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