



# Media Transcript

Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson  
Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC  
Special Minister of State

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## TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW MORNINGS WITH JOHN CECIL – ABC GREAT SOUTHERN

*Topics: Comments by Member for Albany, Peter Watson.*

- PRESENTER:** The Minister is holding his line. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs Michael Ronaldson, good morning.
- MINISTER RONALDSON:** Good morning, John.
- PRESENTER:** Thank you for joining us this morning. First of all, right of reply - response to Mr Watson's comments.
- MINISTER:** Well, look, I am concerned there's a bit of politics being played, John, but this, I think, is above politics. The little cubicle in Canberra, I find interesting.
- I actually live in Ballarat. I don't know whether Peter Watson's ever been to Ballarat, but I've been to Albany at least half a dozen times, and I think I've probably spoken to you on three or four of those. So that's a bit of a cheap shot, and had Peter Watson bothered to talk to me about it, I would have advised him that I've been a very passionate supporter of the Creswick Light Horse.
- Creswick's about 20 kilometres out of Ballarat, and they've had a group out there for 20-odd years now. So I do understand it. I have been to Albany, but in relation to the issue itself, it's interesting that Peter didn't acknowledge that the former Labor Government established a committee for the planning of commemorative events, and that comprised the city of Albany, the Western Australian State Government, the Albany RSL sub-branch, the Australian New Zealand Defence Forces and was chaired by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.
- This decision, John, was not taken by me, and it was not taken by the Department. When I heard

about it, I wrote to Major General Dave Chalmers, who's the chair of the Steering Committee, and asked him to review the decision on the back of representations that I had had, and General Chalmers came back to me and said the committee had reconsidered this matter and their view was that there was too great a risk to people who are in York Street.

Now, the one thing I do agree with Peter Watson is he said that York Street will be packed, and, indeed, York Street will be packed, and that's the very reason why some of these issues have been raised.

Look, John, ultimately, would I, in a perfect world, have liked to have seen them march with the troops? Yes, but I have been advised that on safety grounds it's not appropriate, and I don't know how anyone could possibly imagine that having had that advice from a committee set up by the former government to oversee the commemorative event, having got that advice, how I can, in all conscience, go against that, and quite frankly, I couldn't live with myself if something happened on the day, having got that advice, and, therefore, the decision stands, even if I had the ability to overturn it, which I don't. I am supportive of the decision made by that committee.

**PRESENTER:**

Our guest is Senator Michael Ronaldson, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, and we're talking about the debate that continues to roll on regarding using volunteers and their horses as part of the commemorative march. Minister, the point Dave Chalmers made was that it was for serving members and former serving members. It's not a re-enactment. Does that carry any currency with you?

**MINISTER:**

Well, that is one of the issues that the committee looked at, and I accept their view in relation to that, and they say that there are current serving members of the [indistinct] and 10th Light Horse will be marching with the ADF contingent, but it's the safety issue, ultimately, John, that I was concerned about, and as I said, I couldn't - I think it would be unconscionable for me to try and direct this committee to overturn that decision when it's made on public safety grounds.

Now General Chalmers is discussing some other options with others, and potentially we're looking at something at the corner of York and Serpentine to see whether we can have a presence of the light horse there. That's where the Veterans will march down York Street. That's where the ADF will come up and turn around and go back down again. So there are some options there, and [indistinct]...

**PRESENTER:**

Can I just follow - sorry to jump in. Can I just follow you through on that point. One of the things you'd have to say is coming through very strongly about this is an acknowledgement from the community of the horses and the work they did and a love of them, and there would seem to be a desire to have them included somehow, to have them acknowledged. Would that be a fair statement, do you think?

**MINISTER:**

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Look, John, I grew up with horses. I wasn't quite as keen on going to pony club as my sister was, but, I mean, you know, I was at pony clubs from a very early age. I've grown up with horses. This is an issue about public safety, and I referred before to the Creswick Light Horse.

I mean, they have been doing things for local communities since Adam was a boy at home, and they're fantastic, and I'm great supporter of them, but I was advised by a committee made up of a large number of local groups and others about the safety aspects of this, and I just - it beggars belief that having got that advice that anyone could in all conscience try and overturn that decision.

**PRESENTER:**

Can I just throw at you a comment that is made regularly to this program and to others. The Queen manages to have horses in her parades, and safety doesn't seem to be an issue. Why can't we have horses?

**MINISTER:**

Well, this committee, as I've said before, John, which is made up of a wide number of groups, have made the decision that for safety and other reasons they don't believe it's appropriate, but we are trying to do something to accommodate the light horse men and women. It may well be at the corner of York and Serpentine. That hasn't been finalised yet, but I gather General Chalmers is discussing that.

Look, John, I think it would be a real pity if this one issue overshadowed what is going to be a remarkable weekend for the people of Albany, for the people of Western Australia and for many other Australians, and a lot of people [indistinct]...

**PRESENTER:**

Do you think that's a danger?

**MINISTER:**

A danger, John, in what sense?

**PRESENTER:**

In terms of overshadowing and the issue becoming bigger than the commemoration.

**MINISTER:**

Yeah. Look, I think the decision's made, and I suspect that your listeners in the main, I hope, will be thinking - well, look, he's asked for this to be reviewed. They've come back again and said they have got genuine safety issues, and on the back of that the issue is going to stand.

Now, look, I'm a parent and a grandparent, and as I say, I couldn't - if something happened with me having intervened, I quite frankly could not live with myself. It's just completely untenable for those issues having been raised.

Now, I note in Alannah MacTiernan and Peter Watson and others are trying to stir things up a bit in relation to that. In all conscience, if they were in my position, having been told there were very genuine safety issues, are they really saying that they would just override that and let it go ahead anyway. I would be very, very surprised if that were the situation. And I think what everyone wants is for people to have a safe, secure and enjoyable experience. And that undoubtedly is going to happen over that weekend. I think it will be very exciting. I'm personally really looking forward to it.

Everyone when I've spoken to in Western Australia is really looking forward to it, so I think we need to start focussing on the event now, accept that this is the decision made by a committee set up for the former government who have made the decision and I'm not going to overturn that decision. As I said before, I did ask for it to be reviewed because I have a - quite frankly - deep personal affection for this Light Horse bridge like the Creswick Light Horse that I referred to before. But having asked for that to be reviewed, the committee having

again confirmed their decision, then I of course - I wasn't prepared to intervene further which I'm sure most of your listeners will understand.

**PRESENTER:**

Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Michael Ronaldson, one final question. We're getting very close now to the pointy end of things - not long to go now, six weeks or so - are you happy with how developments are coming on?

**MINISTER:**

I'm really, really happy about it John. I just think this is going to be - it's going to be a fantastic local event which is going to be viewed in a national sense as a really, really important event. And, as you know, this is kicking off the centenary commemorations for us as a nation. All eyes will be on Albany. I'm very, very grateful and deeply grateful to the people of Albany who have really taken up the challenge in relation to this and I think they will be very proud of the outcome and I believe the nation will be equally proud of what they will see over those two days.

**PRESENTER:**

Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Michael Ronaldson, thanks for making some time for us this morning.

**MINISTER:**

Thanks very much, John.

**PRESENTER:**

Nice to talk with you.

**MINISTER:**

Thank you.