

The death of Jim Bolger

Statement by PJ Keating

It was sad for me to learn today of Jim Bolger's death.

As Prime Minister of Australia I had had for four and a half years, a better than working relationship with Jim. An important, indeed central relationship for both our countries.

Jim Bolger was a conservative Prime Minister, but in my experience, a particularly wise one. And importantly, one open to ideas.

In my own experience, he was interested in the Australian Native Title Act that I had enacted in 1992 which gave land title to Indigenous people who could establish a continuous connection to particular land and the traditional way of life. By now, 2025, Indigenous people can lay claim to 56% of the Australian continent and that will probably top out at around 65% when all the cases are completed.

Jim followed the development of the Native Title Act, its passage and effect and would I like to think that there was some of that Australian experience in his own mind as he arrived at his Treaty of Waitangi settlements.

Jim had more than a passing interest in the proposal I had introduced for the development of an Australian republic. Not that he was about to rush into one for New Zealand, but he possessed a more open mind about the inevitability of a republic than his conservative counterparts in Australia.

New Zealand, its economy and community prospered substantially during his prime ministership and internationally, he and I made sure that New Zealand would be a founding member of the APEC Leaders' Meeting where Jim attended with me with Bill Clinton in Seattle in 1992. Interestingly, APEC leaders will meet for their 33rd consecutive meeting in November. Jim certainly had his name on the maker's label.

In personal terms, Jim was a pleasure to be with. In my experience, he was without a doubt, the jolliest and best natured head of government I had come across. The only competition he had for that was Nelson Mandela, who in coincidence, attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in New Zealand in 1995.

Jim Bolger's death is a clear loss to New Zealand, but of course, a greater loss for his wife Joan, who had partnered with him on his long journey. His loss will sharply felt by their children and their long line of grandchildren. All of whom have much to be proud of in their father and grandfather.

Potts Point
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