

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT.HON. R.G. MENZIES  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
16TH MAY, 1952

After close consideration of the immense importance of the Common Market negotiations to Australian production and trade, and to the political future of the British Commonwealth, I have decided that, as the head of the Australian Government, I should make a brief visit, during the Parliamentary recess, to Great Britain and the United States.

Mr. Macmillan, has, in correspondence with me, expressed the hope that I can do this. My colleague, Mr. McEwen, whose recent efforts command our admiration and gratitude, is himself convinced that, in this period when the negotiators are beginning to get to grips with the practical issues, on-the-spot discussions by myself are necessary. I hope to do what I can to reinforce and, where appropriate, supplement his own advocacy. What is clear is that we cannot spare any efforts to see that whatever decisions ultimately emerge, they will not be arrived at without the fullest and clearest understanding of Australia's case, a case which rises superior to any domestic political differences.

The political implications of an entry by Great Britain into the European Economic Community must be very significant. I would wish to discuss them in London at an early date under circumstances not always easy to achieve during the course of a comparatively brief Prime Ministers' Conference.

Other great problems confront us, such as the state of affairs in South East Asia and in New Guinea. These concern, not only us, but our partners in SEATO and ANZUS; our friends generally.

My Government feels that I should take the opportunity of top-level talks not only with the Government of Great Britain, but also with the President of the United States of America. There will be a Prime Ministers' Conference in September, a Conference of historic significance. My own participation in it will, I have concluded, be rendered more effective by the knowledge I hope to gain in my talks in June. The more these great issues are clarified in our own minds, and those of others, the better should it be for wise and fruitful ultimate conclusions.

Certainly, as Prime Minister, I must seek completely to discharge my responsibilities, by all means within my power, to the Parliament and people of Australia.

I now pass to other, and important aspects of the great matters to which I have been referring.

The first is that it would be a misfortune if, during the September Conference, Parliament should be sitting at Canberra. I am not alluding to the problem of pairs, for I know that the Opposition would appreciate the importance of Australia being represented at the Conference. But those representing Australia in London should not, if our case is to be presented with singleness of purpose, be distracted by political events in Canberra. We have therefore proposed to the Leader of the Opposition that, when the general Budget debate is disposed of, at the end of August, the House should adjourn, not for the customary week, but for four weeks. Adjustments can be made thereafter to ensure that the total period of the Budget Session will not be abbreviated.

There is a second matter of some novelty and importance. The Common Market problem concerns both sides of this House, and all sections of the Australian community. When the September Conference has concluded, and its results are reported to this Parliament, it seems to us to be most important, in a matter which transcends our domestic political differences, that leaders on both sides should have had an opportunity of informing their minds, overseas, on the views and attitude of the negotiators and Governments concerned.

I have made it clear to the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who understand and accept what I have said, that a Prime Ministers' Conference is private, and that interim statements cannot come out of it. But at the same time we have invited the Opposition to send some of its leading Members overseas, so that, by consultations of their own choosing, they may acquaint themselves at first hand, with no commitments to us and with no restrictions by us - on the contrary, with every reasonable facility - with the currents of opinion which have such a bearing upon the future of Australia.

I have also informed the Leader of the Opposition that should one or two of the persons chosen by the Opposition desire to make his or their journey during the coming Parliamentary recess rather than in September, that will be acceptable to us.

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