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CABINET DISCUSSIONS WITH MR. BOWDEN

The Australian Cabinet today held discussions with the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. Bowden, on a wide range of current topics.

Among the items discussed were the Kennedy Round, British moves towards entry into the Common Market, British Defence policy, Viet Nam and Rhodesia.

In introducing Mr. Bowden to Cabinet, Mr. Holt explained that the meeting offered an opportunity for the Australian Cabinet to hear first hand the views of the British Government on the current issues of concern to both of them. The meeting did not have as its purpose negotiation on any matter.

The Australian Ministers were particularly interested in the background of Britain's present moves towards Europe and Mr. Wilson's recent efforts to help with negotiations on Viet Nam. It was agreed that the two Governments would continue to keep in the closest contact on these questions.

Recent developments on the Rhodesian problem were also discussed in detail, and the Prime Minister noted that Mr. Bowden was specially qualified in this question. Although the position of the Australian Government remained that it continued to regard Rhodesia as a matter primarily for the British Government, the matter held vital implications for the Commonwealth, and a continuing exchange of views was essential to help in resolving the issue.

The Australian Government expressed appreciation to Mr. Bowden for the continuing British military presence in South East Asia. Australia, New Zealand and British collaboration had been an important element in bringing stability to this area. A history of effort going back to the days of the Communist insurgency in Malaya had produced working arrangements which made the Commonwealth effort an integral part of the defence of the region.

Arrangements for the Australian feasibility study in respect of Cockburn Sound Naval Support Facility are proceeding and will take into account possible British use of the facilities in certain contingencies.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Holt, expressed appreciation for Mr. Bowden's visit stating that, while it was customary for a Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs to visit Commonwealth countries, it was a matter of considerable importance to us that Mr. Bowden, with his close knowledge of Commonwealth problems and grasp of international issues of special significance for Australia should visit us at this time when issues of such moment were before both Governments.

CANBERRA,
22nd February, 1967.