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DISCUSSIONS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF
THE ASSOCIATED CHAMBERS OF MANUFACTURES

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Holt

At the request of the Associated Chambers of Manufactures, I had a discussion this morning with the Federal President, Mr F.C. Curtis, and the six State Presidents of the Chambers. The meeting had been sought to inform me of views held by the members of ACMA on problems which could arise for manufacturing industry consequential upon the British devaluation of sterling and the Australian Government's decision to maintain the existing value of the Australian dollar.

It was put to me that difficulties could arise in various directions. There could be an increased penetration of the Australian market by British exports taking advantage of the favourable position created for them by the sterling devaluation. The British competitive edge was likely to be felt not only on the Australian market, but in those export markets - particularly New Zealand - where Australian manufactures had been making some headway. Problems could arise for individual manufactures from cancellation of orders as well as from a reduced share of the Australian and export markets.

I assured the manufacturers' delegation that the Government was fully conscious of the importance to the Australian economy and our national well-being, of healthy and expanding manufacturing industries. This had been stressed by me in a number of statements I had made in the course of this year. We would therefore wish to be helpful in meeting these problems. I said it was probable that the problems for different Australian industries would emerge at different times and to different degrees. This seemed to me to call for a selective approach rather than for one across the board which ACMA had proposed. I pointed to the machinery already in existence for the protection of Australian manufactures, including the Tariff Board and the special advisory authority system. A special advisory authority had been set up to ensure that in those cases where the threat, or actuality, of serious damage could be demonstrated, remedial action could be taken speedily with safeguards of subsequent Tariff Board enquiry.

I recommended the revival of the industry panel system which had previously proved helpful working in co-operation with the Department of Trade and Industry. This would permit a thorough examination of the facts and, where justified, assist in the preparation of a case to the Government seeking emergency action by the special advisory authority.

I told the representatives of ACMA that study had already commenced on the effects of the British decision, and undertook to bring their views to the meeting of Cabinet scheduled for next week. I have also agreed that, within the fortnight following that meeting,

I would arrange for ACMA representatives to meet with the Economic Committee of Cabinet. This interval of time would enable the Government and the Chambers to form a clearer picture of the likely consequences and the experience of their members in the period immediately following the British devaluation.

CANBERRA,
22nd November, 1967

BACKGROUND : The ACMA delegation comprised :-

Mr Frank R. Curtis, President
Mr W.W. Pettingell, Vice President
Mr M.I. MacTaggart, President, New South Wales
Mr L.H. Waite, President, Victoria
Mr W. Hughes, President, Western Australia
Mr A. Gehrman, President, Queensland
Mr S. Thyne, President, Tasmania
Mr W.J. Henderson, Assistant Director.