

FOR PRESS

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OFFSHORE MINERALS LEGISLATION

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton



The Prime Minister, Mr. Gorton, announced today that the Minister for National Development as President of the Australian Minerals Council had invited the State Ministers for Mines to attend a meeting of the Council which would be held in Adelaide on Tuesday 9th June.

Early next week and well prior to the meeting of 9th June, the Commonwealth would send to the States the draft Offshore Mining Bill together with the Heads of Agreement suggested by the Commonwealth to be the basis of arrangements between the Commonwealth and the States for the administration of the legislation.

The Offshore Mining Bill would not be introduced into the Commonwealth Parliament until after the discussions with the States in the Australian Minerals Council. In the meantime the debate on the Territorial Sea and Continental Shelf Bill which was introduced in the Federal Parliament on 16 April, would be held over until after the meeting.

Mr. Gorton said that the Commonwealth Government remained firmly of the view that it was highly desirable in Australia's national and international interests to have the legal position as to the respective jurisdiction of the Commonwealth and the States in offshore areas resolved as soon as possible. As had been indicated by the Minister for National Development in his second reading speech on the Territorial Sea and Continental Shelf Bill on 16th April 1970, this would be a matter for decision by the courts.

Mr. Gorton added that as an earnest of the Commonwealth's desire to see this matter settled, the Commonwealth Government had decided that it would meet the legal costs of the States in conducting their case. Although the Commonwealth wished to see the issues determined by the High Court, this in no way detracted from the Commonwealth's wish to work in close co-operation with the States in the effective and efficient administration of Australia's offshore areas. With this in mind the Minister for National Development at the meeting of the Australian Minerals Council on 9th June would be seeking to establish a sound working relationship between the State Governments and the Commonwealth Government.

CANBERRA
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