



PRIME MINISTER

THE PROGRESS OF QUEENSLAND

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
AT THE OPENING OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CENTRE,
ANN STREET, BRISBANE, FRIDAY 23 MARCH 1973

This is my first visit to Queensland since my Government took office. It is a happy occasion for me. It has also provided me with my first opportunity as Prime Minister to talk to the Queensland Premier and his Ministers. This, too, has been personally gratifying. Our talks have been no less cordial for being overdue, and I thank Mr. Bjelke-Petersen for his invitation to meet him. I trust that no one will detect any sinister symbolism in the fact that my first official duty here is to open new offices for the national Government. This splendid building should be regarded in no sense as a foreign mission. Contrary to what some people are saying, Queensland is still part of Australia. My Government's interests and Australia's interests are one and indissoluble, and for my part we are determined to work together to advance them.

My Government's commitment to the welfare and progress of Queensland is both general and specific. It is based on two great themes. There is first our general commitment to the cities. In Queensland 60 per cent of the people live in Brisbane and its suburbs. It is in these areas that my Government's attack on the problems of land and housing costs, school opportunities, hospitals, public transport, unemployment, migrant welfare and access to community resources for recreation, sport and culture are principally directed. We have already established a Department of Urban and Regional Development to co-ordinate our work of rebuilding and regenerating our cities. Queensland will share in that process. The related task of bringing new standards of social welfare to the people - a fundamental theme of all Labor governments - has been entrusted to our new Department of Social Security. I remind you that this Department is headed by a Queenslander, my colleague Bill Hayden.

The second part of my Government's commitment to Queensland is a specific one. It is in our policies for northern development. That Department is also headed by a Queensland Minister, Dr. Rex Patterson. It is our aim, in co-operation with the Government of Queensland, to develop the vast and valuable resources of northern Australia for the benefit of the Australian people. It is in the north that the great sugar and cattle industries and much of our mineral industries have been established. It is in the north that Australians face their greatest challenge in retaining the ownership of the nation's resources and developing new industries under Australian control.

My Government has made one other specific pledge to the Queensland people. We have undertaken that one of our two main initiatives in regional development will be concentrated in Townsville. I said last year in my policy speech that the national Government was already responsible for decisions which have determined the growth - and the burdens - of Townsville more than any other Australian city except Canberra itself. What is being done for Albury-Wodonga in the southern States can be done for Townsville and other centres in Queensland.

Albury-Wodonga is one of the best examples to date of what fruitful collaboration between the States and the new national Government can achieve. It is the sort of co-operation we must foster and preserve. My meeting with Mr. Hamer and Sir Robert Askin on 25 January was the first time the Governments of the two oldest States had come together with the Commonwealth to plan the development of a new city. I trust that with similar co-operation in Queensland the prospects for the future growth and prosperity of Townsville will be as bright as those for Albury-Wodonga.

As one instance of my Government's determination to give greater importance and prestige to Townsville, we have undertaken that Townsville will be made an international airport. Townsville, the gateway to the Barrier Reef, is vital to our developing tourist industry. It is vital to Australia as a whole.

There has been one other notable example since my Government took office of what co-operation between the States and the national Government can achieve in the interests of all. Early this month, I met the Premiers of New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria to discuss the future use of the waters of the River Murray. This meeting was called on the initiative of one of the States - South Australia. Its results will be largely to the benefit of that State. I believe the measures which will flow from that meeting will improve the quantity and quality of the waters of the Murray available to South Australia. I am proud that my Government, through its participation in that meeting, will help bring these benefits to that State, and I hope that through similar co-operative ventures we will bring similar benefits to the people of Queensland.

Since my Government took office I have made numerous offers to the State Governments, including Queensland, to assist them with local and regional problems common to all of us. One of these was an attempt to control the soaring prices of land and housing, which are denying a decent home to thousands of Australian families. My Government proposes to set up Land Development Commissions to acquire and make available residential land on reasonable terms. I have written to all the Premiers proposing action on these lines.

I have also written to the Premiers offering special grants to overcome the backlog in sewerage services in the principal cities. I have written to them outlining the terms of my Government's offer to take over the uneconomic State railway services which impose crippling financial burdens on all State Governments. My Government has offered the States additional funds totalling \$52 million for unemployment relief works - of which Queensland's share was \$5.6 million. We have approved for Queensland an extra \$5,124,000 from the \$27.5 million increase in the borrowing program for the States' local and semi-governmental authorities.

Our most recent action was my Cabinet's decision this week to amend the Commonwealth Grants Commission Act to allow us to make special grants to the States for local government. This is in line with our policy of allowing local Government full participation in, and access to, the fund-raising processes of this country.

I am confident that in all these initiatives we will receive the ready co-operation of the States. I am confident that the people will not be side-tracked and hood-winked by specious slogans about centralism and States rights. What our opponents like to call centralism is the overdue recognition by the national Government of its responsibilities in areas which that Government alone can discharge. Our responsibility is to ensure viable and efficient local government. Local government in this city happens to be the most efficient and progressive system of local government in Australia.

It is efficient and progressive because it is organised on broad regional lines. It is, if you like, the most distinctive example of centralism in Australia. Similarly, when we talk of States rights, let us remember that the rights of people are more important than the rights of Governments. My Government emphasises people's rights - their rights to a decent home, to a modern transport service, to a full education, to a pleasing and unpolluted neighbourhood, to an equal share in life's opportunities for recreation, leisure and cultural fulfilment. These are the rights we hold paramount.

I pay tribute to all those who planned and built this new Government centre. It will provide a link between Governments and people. I hope it will be seen as a symbol of the co-operative spirit that must prevail between Queensland and the Australian Government. The true progress of our people depends on this co-operation. There is much that our Governments can do alone; there is much more they can do together. The greatest enemy of progress, development and efficiency in our country has been the old-fashioned, discredited rivalry that has prevailed between States and between centres within the States. Queensland in many ways is the State which has best managed to suppress these rivalries. It is in many ways the proudest and most individualistic of States. Despite its enormous size it has a unique cohesion and corporate pride.

It is of all States the least urbanised, the most decentralised, the most diverse in its climatic conditions and natural resources.

I make this earnest appeal to you all:
Let us work together in co-operation and good will for a greater and more prosperous Queensland in a greater and more prosperous Australia.

It will be a tragedy for the Queensland people if local jealousy, parochial sentiment and intolerant suspicion are allowed to stand in the way of Queensland's progress. I offer a lasting contract of mutual goodwill and shared purpose between our Governments. Our ultimate interests are the same, and I am sure that our common aims will be approved by the people of your great State and by your fellow Australians.

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