



PRIME MINISTER

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METROPOLITAN AREA IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM - WESTERN SECTORS OF SYDNEY
AND MELBOURNE

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
THE PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SIR ROBERT ASKIN AND THE PREMIER OF
VICTORIA, MR. R. HAMER

The Australian Government and the State Governments of New South Wales and Victoria have agreed upon a program to improve the standards of living and opportunities available to residents in the Western Sectors of Sydney and Melbourne.

This was announced in Canberra today in a joint statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, and the Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria, Sir Robert Askin and Mr. R. Hamer.

They said that the scheme which will begin a five-year "Metropolitan Area Improvement Program" will be aimed at bringing the western sectors of each city up to a standard of services comparable with that of the metropolitan area generally. Similar programs may be considered in other sectors of these and other Australian cities as part of a national program of urban area improvement.

Australian Government finance for the scheme will be provided by an allocation in the Budget of the Department of Urban and Regional Development which will be announced tomorrow (21 August). The Australian Government will co-operate with State and local governments, together with local interest groups in carrying out the program.

Various projects will be undertaken to improve physical and social resources and to increase the administrative and planning skills available to both sectors.

Mr. Whitlam said that it was generally recognised that the Western sectors of Sydney and Melbourne had faced rapid population growth in environmentally deprived areas: "It is the policy of the Australian Government to try to eliminate the inequalities existing in the cities and rural regions throughout the nation; we also want to be involved as the National Government in making our cities and towns more stimulating and pleasant places in which to live", he said.

"We have chosen the Western sectors of Sydney and Melbourne as the first in a series of urban projects because it is in these areas that the problems of inequality and deprivation are more obviously observed. Experience gained will be useful in solving problems in other areas resulting from similar processes of rapid urbanisation."

There are a number of reasons why the Western sectors stand out as needing Government assistance, the Prime Minister and the Premiers said.

These areas have a rapid growth rate, and a high proportion of children and lower income families. They also have a large percentage of migrants. These are the groups which place a heavy demand on public facilities, such as education, social welfare and public transport.

Both sectors have suffered because, while housing has usually been available, there has not been a corresponding development of community facilities and social opportunities. Councils in the areas have found they do not have adequate finance to provide these facilities in step with demand, without help from State and Federal Governments.

The main deficiencies appear to be in health, education, transport, employment and community welfare services.

Submissions received by the Department of Urban and Regional Development from councils in both western sectors showed that the problems emphasised were similar. Councils stressed the need for more and better physical facilities, improved levels of community services, additional skilled personnel and a wider range of opportunities for residents in the area. These included specifically, more hospital beds, special medical and health facilities, more schools and better teachers, and increased job opportunities.

The submissions have come from Councils in the western sectors who have voluntarily joined together to identify problem areas and implement appropriate solutions with the help of the Australian and the State Governments.

The local government areas involved in these initial Area Improvement Programs will include:

Melbourne: Werribee, Bacchus Marsh, Melton, Bulla, Keilor, Essendon, Sunshine, Altona, Williamstown and Footscray.

Sydney: Colo, Windsor, Penrith, Blue Mountains, Blacktown, Fairfield, Holyroyd, Parramatta, Auburn and Baulkham Hills.

In Melbourne, eight of the Councils have formed a group called the Western Region Commission, and it is understood that consideration is currently being given to the inclusion of the two remaining Councils, Bacchus Marsh and Bulla.

In Sydney, two groups of five councils have grouped together and prepared submissions on some of the principal deficiencies of their area.

The Metropolitan Area Improvement Program has the broad aim of building up physical facilities and community resources to an appropriate standard over a five-year period. The Department of Urban and Regional Development will assist in co-ordinating Federal financial and technical support through these programs.

As part of the Metropolitan Area Improvement Program, the Department of Urban and Regional Development also proposes to set up a small expert Task Force to advise the Australian Government and both States concerned on how Federal funds might best be allocated.

There are a number of different measures whereby the Area Improvement Programs could be implemented. To improve the physical resources of each sector there is a need to improve transport services, to undertake environmental improvement projects and to assist in the construction of capital works, such as distributor roads, bridges, sewerage, drainage and flood mitigation works, and community facilities associated with housing and employment. There will be an analysis of the potential use of strategic areas of Australian Government land. To develop the social resources of the region there will be: studies of manpower planning and employment promotion, the establishment of a regional library and information service, research into the needs of housebound women and demonstration projects with adventure playgrounds. To increase the administrative and planning resources available to the region, assistance could be provided to metropolitan and State planning authorities in their sector planning and satellite city development, as well as to groups of local councils.

The Prime Minister and the Premiers welcomed the Metropolitan Area Improvement Program as a significant step towards solving some of our major urban problems and involving local people in planning for the improvement of their areas.

CANBERRA, A.C.T.