

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
AT THE OPENING OF THE MASTER BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION CENTENARY
PARADE OF HOMES AND PRESENTATION OF THE "PEARCE RESERVE" TO
THE MUNICIPALITY OF BLACKTOWN, AT KINGS LANGLEY, NEAR SEVEN
HILLS, FRIDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 1973

NO ONE SEEING THIS EXHIBITION CAN BE OTHER THAN IMPRESSED AND ENCOURAGED BY THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN BUILDING INDUSTRY. NO ONE CAN DOUBT THE INDUSTRY'S ABILITY TO PROVIDE HOUSING OF HIGH QUALITY AND IMAGINATIVE DESIGN. IT WOULD BE A PITY, HOWEVER, IF THIS FINE DISPLAY OF HOMES WERE USED MERELY AS A PROMOTIONAL EXERCISE. IT SHOULD ALSO SERVE TO REMIND US OF A RESPONSIBILITY WE ALL SHARE - GOVERNMENTS, BUILDERS, DEVELOPERS, AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES - TO ENSURE THAT THE HOUSING NEEDS OF OUR PEOPLE ARE FULLY AND PROMPTLY MET.

THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WAITING A LONG TIME FOR A FAIR DEAL IN HOUSING. I HOPE YOU WILL FORGIVE ME IF I RECALL SOME WORDS I USED 20 YEARS AGO, IN MY FIRST SPEECH IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT. I SAID THEN:

" NO ONE THINKS THAT 20 YEARS AGO THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA WERE ADEQUATELY HOUSED; AND NOBODY THINKS THAT THEY ARE ADEQUATELY HOUSED NOW."

TWENTY YEARS LATER, THOSE WORDS ARE STILL TRUE. IT IS SHAMEFUL THAT IN 1973, THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA ARE STILL NOT ADEQUATELY HOUSED. IT IS SHAMEFUL THAT IN A NATION WITH ABUNDANT SPACE, CONSIDERABLE WEALTH, A MODEST POPULATION, AND A GENERAL COMMITMENT TO THE IDEALS OF SOCIAL WELFARE, THOUSANDS OF AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES ARE BADLY HOUSED AND ARE UNABLE TO AFFORD THIS FUNDAMENTAL AMENITY OF A DECENT LIFE. MY GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO PUT THIS RIGHT. WE ARE DETERMINED TO ENSURE, WITH THE HELP OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, THAT EVERY AUSTRALIAN FAMILY CAN SECURE ACCOMMODATION OF ITS OWN CHOOSING, APPROPRIATE TO ITS OWN NEEDS.

THE BUDGET BROUGHT DOWN BY MY COLLEAGUE, THE TREASURER, LAST MONTH WAS ONE OF THE PRIMARY INSTRUMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT'S DRIVE FOR BETTER HOUSING. WE TOOK ACTION ON SEVERAL FRONTS. OUR PRIORITIES CAN BEST BE SUMMED UP BY COMPARING OUR FIRST BUDGET WITH THAT OF LAST YEAR. BY FAR THE BIGGEST INCREASE - 324 PER CENT - WAS IN THE CATEGORY OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY AMENITIES.

WE PROVIDED \$136 MILLION FOR OUR INITIATIVES IN THE CITIES, INCLUDING \$33 MILLION FOR EXPENDITURE ON NEW CITIES SUCH AS ALBURY-WODONGA. WE HAVE SET ASIDE \$30 MILLION THIS FINANCIAL YEAR TO HELP THE STATES ACQUIRE LAND FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT. THIS SHOULD BE SEEN AS MERELY THE BEGINNING OF A CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IN LAND ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT FOR THE BENEFIT AND WELFARE OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY. AT THE PREMIERS' CONFERENCE IN JUNE WE AGREED TO ADVANCE \$219 MILLION TO THE STATES FOR WELFARE HOUSING PURPOSES. THIS IS 26 PER CENT MORE THAN IN 1972-73. WE PROVIDED \$102 MILLION IN THE BUDGET FOR HOUSING LOANS UNDER THE DEFENCE SERVICE HOMES SCHEME THIS FINANCIAL YEAR. FINALLY, AS YOU KNOW, WE HAVE INTRODUCED A GRADUATED FORM OF TAX DEDUCTIONS OF INTEREST RATES FOR HOME BUYERS.

THE KEY TO ALL OUR EFFORTS FOR DECENT HOUSING IS AN ATTACK ON THE HIGH PRICE OF LAND. IT IS INTOLERABLE THAT YOUNG HOME BUYERS IN THIS CONTINENT SHOULD OFTEN PAY MORE FOR AN EMPTY BLOCK THAN THEY DO FOR A HOUSE. WE ARE DETERMINED TO SEE THAT MORE LAND IS MADE AVAILABLE FOR HOUSING AT REASONABLE PRICES. THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS NEGOTIATING WITH THE STATES TO ESTABLISH LAND COMMISSIONS. THEIR PURPOSE WILL BE TO INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF LAND AVAILABLE FOR HOUSING AND TO INCREASE THE MARKET COMPETITION IN THE SUBDIVISION AND SALE OF HOUSING LAND. IN THE SAME WAY, OUR NEW CITY PROJECTS, UNDERTAKEN WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE STATES, WILL HELP ATTRACT POPULATION GROWTH AND HOUSING DEMAND AWAY FROM THE METROPOLITAN AREAS AND INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF LAND FOR HOUSING.

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS ENCOURAGING THE STATES TO ADOPT LEGISLATION FOR LAND PRICE STABILISATION. FROM READING THE NEWSPAPERS ONE COULD BE FORGIVEN FOR BELIEVING THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS ABOUT TO FREEZE LAND PRICES ALL OVER AUSTRALIA. WE OUGHT TO BE QUITE CLEAR THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS NO POWER TO FREEZE LAND PRICES, OR EVEN TO STABILISE THEM. THE STATES HAVE THE POWER TO DO BOTH. SOUTH AUSTRALIA HAS RECENTLY INTRODUCED A PRICE CONTROL ON HOME SITES. UNDER THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SCHEME, THE FUTURE SELLING PRICE OF HOUSING SITES IS RESTRICTED TO THEIR PRESENT MARKET VALUE PLUS AN INFLATION FACTOR OF 7 PER CENT PER ANNUM. IN THIS WAY, THE INCENTIVE FOR SPECULATIVE DEALING IN HOUSE SITES IS REMOVED. NEW SOUTH WALES AND VICTORIA HAVE ALSO ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION OF INTRODUCING LAND PRICE STABILISATION LEGISLATION. WE WANT ALL STATES TO CO-OPERATE IN DEALING WITH THIS PROBLEM.

WE SHOULD NOT DELUDE OURSELVES THAT LAND PRICE INFLATION IS CAUSED ONLY BY THE SPECULATOR. LOOKING FOR SIMPLE SCAPEGOATS LIKE SPECULATORS WILL NOT, IN THE LONG RUN, SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT EXCESSIVE DEMAND THROUGH LAND SPECULATION CAUSES SOME OF THE LAND PRICE SPIRAL. LAND PRICE INFLATION CAN ALSO BE CAUSED BY A REAL SHORTAGE OF HOUSING LAND. AGAIN, I SUGGEST, THE STATE GOVERNMENTS CAN ADOPT A NUMBER OF MEASURES TO OVERCOME THIS DEFICIENCY. THEY CAN STREAMLINE THEIR PRESENT PLANNING MACHINERY TO REDUCE DELAYS IN THE LAND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS. THEY CAN ENCOURAGE LAND OWNERS SITTING ON LAND SUITABLE FOR SUBDIVISION TO SUBDIVIDE IT AND SELL IT. THEY CAN ASSIST IN REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF UNPRODUCTIVE TRADING IN BLOCKS OF LAND.

I HOPE I WILL NOT BE ACCUSED OF SELF-AGGRANDISEMENT IF I QUOTE SOME REMARKS ONCE MADE IN THIS CONTEXT BY SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL. HE STATED THE POSITION VERY ACCURATELY IN THESE WORDS:

"A LAND OWNER WHO HAPPENS TO OWN A PLOT OF LAND ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF A BIG CITY WATCHES THE BUSY POPULATION AROUND HIM MAKING THE CITY LARGER AND MORE FAMOUS EVERY DAY AND ALL THE WHILE HE SITS AND DOES NOTHING. ROADS ARE MADE, SERVICES ARE IMPROVED AND WATER IS BROUGHT FROM RESERVOIRS A HUNDRED MILES AWAY. AND ALL THE WHILE THE LAND OWNER SITS STILL. EVERY ONE OF THESE IMPROVEMENTS IS EFFECTED BY THE LABOUR AND THE COST OF OTHER PEOPLE. TO NOT ONE OF THESE IMPROVEMENTS DOES THE LAND OWNER, AS A LAND OWNER, CONTRIBUTE, AND YET EVERY ONE OF THEM ENHANCES THE VALUE OF HIS LAND. HE RENDERS NO SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY, HE CONTRIBUTES NOTHING TO THE GENERAL WELFARE, HE CONTRIBUTES NOTHING TO THE PROCESS FROM WHICH HIS OWN ENRICHMENT IS DERIVED."

ONE OF THE DEPRESSING FEATURES OF THE PATTERN OF OUR URBAN GROWTH IS THAT WHILE WE HAVE BUILT PLENTY OF HOUSES IN OUTLYING AREAS OF OUR GREAT CITIES, THERE HAS BEEN NO CORRESPONDING DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES. UNLIKE OUR PREDECESSORS, WE DO NOT EQUATE HOUSING WITH SHELTER. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO ERECT ACRES OF HOUSES IN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL WASTELANDS. WE MUST PROVIDE MORE AESTHETIC AND CONGENIAL SURROUNDINGS - AND MORE SERVICES - FOR THOSE WHO ARE BUILDING THEIR HOMES.

SO MUCH OF WHAT IS PLEASANT AND COMFORTABLE IN OUR LIVING ENVIRONMENT CAN BE PROVIDED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT. IN THE LAST SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, WE AMENDED THE GRANTS COMMISSION ACT TO ENABLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO APPLY ON A REGIONAL BASIS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. COUNCILS WILL BE ABLE TO DECIDE WHERE LAND SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND WHAT WILL BE BUILT UPON IT. LOCAL GOVERNMENT MUST BE GIVEN THE RESOURCES - IN FINANCE AND EXPERTISE - TO COPE WITH ITS INCREASING RESPONSIBILITIES IN ENVIRONMENT, WELFARE AND HOUSING.

GOVERNMENTS, HOWEVER, CANNOT PROVIDE ALL THE AMENITIES AND SERVICES THAT AUSTRALIANS NEED. PROGRESSIVE AND PUBLIC-SPIRITED DEVELOPERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO DO MORE. THIS GREAT HOUSING ESTATE, AND THE RESERVE BUILT UPON IT, SHOWS HOW THE BEST AND MOST ATTRACTIVE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS CAN RESPOND TO THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS. TOO MANY DEVELOPERS IGNORE THESE NEEDS. BY BRINGING HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE INTO AN AREA TO SATISFY A DEMAND FOR HOUSING, SEVERE STRAINS ARE IMPOSED UPON SERVICES AND AMENITIES. I SUGGEST THAT IF PRIVATE DEVELOPERS WANT PLANNING APPROVAL FOR THEIR INITIATIVES IN SUBDIVIDED ESTATES, THEY MUST BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS.

THIS HANDSOME DISPLAY OF HOUSES IS TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN BUILDING INDUSTRY CAN PRODUCE. THE NEW RESERVE AND RECREATION FACILITIES WILL ADD GREATLY TO THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE WHOLE AREA. I CONGRATULATE THE MANY BUILDERS INVOLVED; I CONGRATULATE THE HOOKER CORPORATION. NO AUSTRALIAN SHOULD FEEL THAT HOUSING OF THIS QUALITY, IN THIS ENVIRONMENT, WITH THESE ROADS AND SERVICES, IS BEYOND HIS MEANS OR RESOURCES. NO AUSTRALIAN SHOULD FEEL THAT A COMFORTABLE AND WELL-BUILT HOME IN PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS IS BEYOND HIS DREAMS. LET THIS BE THE STANDARD OF HOUSING - EXEMPLIFIED IN THIS EXHIBITION TODAY - WHICH WE SEEK FOR ALL OUR PEOPLE.
