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PRIME MINISTER

Press Statement No. 186

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NATURAL DISASTERS ORGANISATION

Members of the Cabinet spent much of today reviewing the capacity of the nation to meet major natural disasters when it hits us in any form

Cabinet decided to create a Natural Disasters Organisation which will absorb the existing Civil Defence Organisation and put new emphasis on the threat of floods, bushfires and other disasters. I have been authorised by Cabinet to communicate with all the Premiers immediately suggesting the earliest possible meeting of Ministers to consider our proposals in detail. My telegrams have already been despatched.

Emergency measures for flood relief taken by the Australian Government and others will continue uninterrupted. Submissions made to Cabinet for the proposed new Natural Disasters Organisation came forward under two headings.

One involved the organisation to be associated with our defence forces and the other is concerned with the mitigation of financial losses. On the latter, Cabinet agreed to hear the views of the commercial insurance companies and to commence inquiries into the possibility of wider insurance cover than is at present available.

The Minister for Defence, Mr. Barnard and the Treasurer, Mr. Crean will make such detailed statements as are appropriate.

Apart from the flood damage suffered by the farmers, there is evidence enough that ill-planned and over-crowded cities are exposing people to great dangers in times of disaster. It can be anticipated that this Government will look very warily at any future projects that might expose people or the environment to peril.

A detailed account of Queensland's recent terrible experiences prepared by my Department, was made available to all Ministers. It stated among other things that it is still not possible to estimate the cost of the floods in terms either of human hardship or material losses.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.