



## PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 209

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### ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY

The Australian Government has approved a project to provide major protection for the Australian livestock industry.

It has decided to build a laboratory complex, to be called the Animal Health Laboratory, at Geelong, Victoria.

The capital cost of the complex is expected to be \$56 million. This spending will begin in 1976/77 and will be spread over five years.

The laboratory will help provide protection on a national basis for one of our most important rural industries.

The Australian livestock industry had an estimated gross value of production in 1972/73 of \$3,000 million. In the same year the industry's exports were worth an estimated \$2,000 million.

The laboratory complex will provide protection by performing the following functions:

- . diagnosis of exotic animal disease,
- . testing of vaccines required for exotic disease control,
- . research on major virus diseases in Australian animals,
- . the production of foot and mouth vaccine if required.

The laboratory complex will be established on the Geelong Rifle Range, which is owned by the Australian Government. Compensating arrangements will be made as required for organisations disadvantaged by the project.

The Australian Health Laboratory will be administered and operated by the C.S.I.R.O. on behalf of the Australian Government.

Following the establishment of the laboratory a consultative committee, consisting of C.S.I.R.O. and departmental representatives, will be formed to assist in the determination of priorities and to ensure effective liaison on policy matters.

The Consultative Committee will provide an essential link with the Animal Quarantine Branch of the Department of Health for the testing of livestock in the proposed off-shore High Security Animal Quarantine Station.

The Committee will also provide a liaison channel for special research, training, diagnosis and epidemiology with the proposed Bureau of Animal Health in the Department of Primary Industry.

At full operation, the Animal Health Laboratory will employ a staff of 170 including 25 scientists.

Its annual operating costs will be approximately \$3 million.

The laboratory would play a vital role in minimising the impact on the Australian economy of an outbreak of foot and mouth or other introduced animal disease.

Should an outbreak of exotic disease occur, the existence of the laboratory would be vital to any eradication program and would be an important factor in persuading Australia's trading partners that eradication had been achieved.

It will also provide a facility for carrying out special testing for potentially valuable livestock held in quarantine before they were allowed into Australia for breeding programs.

It will also be a valuable facility for research on virus diseases endemic in Australia, several of which affect man as well as livestock.

Final design of the laboratory followed a study tour of overseas microbiological security establishments by a government evaluation team.

The Geelong site, currently the Geelong Rifle Range, was chosen following extensive consideration of a wide range of alternative sites.

The final choice was made on the advice of the Cities Commission in the light of the Government's policy of developing specific growth centres and with the approval of the Victorian Government.

A comprehensive environmental impact statement for the site accompanied the Cabinet submission.

The Department of the Environment and Conservation which assessed this statement noted the amount of technical detail supplied and advised that it was satisfied that the environmental issues of the proposal had been adequately covered.

Because of the extreme precautions built into the design, there will be no risk to Australian livestock.

The laboratory complex will be technically the most sophisticated major structure in Australia and the most modern animal diseases laboratory in the world.

It will operate as a series of integrated engineering systems, which provide isolation from the external environment.

It features multiple fail-safe devices and procedures including air locks, shower locks, filter systems of many kinds and sophisticated waste disposal apparatus.

All air entering or leaving the laboratory will be specially filtered.

The air leaving the high hazard area will be heat sterilised to kill virus particles.

Solid wastes will be destroyed or rendered sterile.

Operation of the complex will have no detrimental effects on the environment.

In accordance with overseas practice, the keeping of susceptible livestock will not be permitted in a buffer zone one mile in radius around the laboratory.

This will include sheep, cattle, pigs, goats, horses, fowls, turkeys, geese and ducks.

The Victorian Government has agreed to the relocation of the trotting and dog-racing track currently in the vicinity by the time the laboratory is complete in 1981.

The building has been designed by a group of specialists formed within the Department of Housing and Construction who have worked in close consultation with C.S.I.R.O. and an expert from the Department of Health.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The impact of an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the livestock industry would be immediate and far reaching. Much of our trade in meat and other livestock products would cease and it would be many months, even years, before normal trade was resumed.

There are many other livestock diseases exotic to Australia, some as potentially devastating as foot and mouth disease, others less so, but all capable of seriously affecting our livestock industries. While Australia has a remarkable record of success in remaining free of these diseases, there is no certainty that this situation can be sustained for ever.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that sooner or later a major exotic disease of livestock will penetrate our quarantine barriers. If this were to happen, Australia's veterinary authorities would be severely handicapped at present by the absence of a laboratory possessing a great enough degree of microbiological security to enable highly infectious material to be handled in complete safety without risk of escape. If vaccination became necessary for control and eradication of a disease, the Animal Health Laboratory would be involved in testing the potency and safety of the vaccines used.

The Laboratory would be absolutely essential for the enormous amount of work needed not only to eradicate the disease but also to demonstrate to other countries that eradication had been successful. If a situation arose where overseas trade in meat or some other livestock products had been suspended as a result of an outbreak of a major disease, the absence of such a facility could seriously prejudice the early resumption of trade with our trading partners.

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