

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT
ASSISTANCE TO MACKAY
AND ITS REGION

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
THE HON. E. G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
ON HIS VISIT TO MACKAY
14 SEPTEMBER 1974

Mackay is typical of the regions benefiting from Australian Government policies to improve local government services and promote equal opportunities for Australian citizens wherever they may live.

While Mackay is one of the richest regions of Australia and of great importance to the national economy, the Government has given special attention to its needs and its future development.

One of the most important Labor Government initiatives has been to empower the Grants Commission to recommend financial assistance to local government bodies. The Government's objective is to reduce inequalities between regions and to ensure that people everywhere enjoy the same opportunities and living standards.

Last month the Government accepted in full the first series of grants recommended by the Commission. Of the Australian total of \$56.3 million, Queensland will receive \$8,954,000. Grants to local government in the Mackay region total \$397,000, including a grant of \$64,000 to Mackay City Council.

No strings were attached to these grants. They will help local government bodies improve community services and initiate important development projects.

By giving help where it is most needed - after careful and impartial investigation by the Grants Commission - the Government hopes to give people in country cities and regions the same standards and amenities as the capital cities.

RESOURCES

Mackay is the centre of several important industries, including sugar, coal and beef production. The region produces more than one-quarter of Australia's sugar.

The Government acknowledges this vital contribution to the national economy and is determined to assist and strengthen these industries in every possible way.

Australian exports of sugar are now worth more than \$300 million a year. The market remains buoyant. Through the efforts of Dr Rex Patterson, the Minister for Northern Development, firm overseas markets have been secured for sugar, with substantial long-term contracts already signed with Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea. Negotiations are in progress with China, the United Kingdom and Japan.

The Government is making a \$5 million grant for the Kinchant Dam to help stabilise sugar-cane production in an area subject to droughts.

Productivity in the beef industry has risen sharply. To help meet problems due to world oversupply, the Australian Government is sending a high-level trade delegation to Brussels and Tokyo and is seeking consultations with the E.E.C. under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

The Government will spend \$24 million on beef roads in Queensland over the next three years.

To further develop the vast coal resources of the region, the Australian Government has commissioned a report on the industrial development prospects of the Bowen Coalfields Basin with special reference to a possible steelworks.

FLOOD RELIEF

The Australian Government is providing massive financial assistance for restoration work following the recent disastrous floods. Under the Queensland Flood Relief Act 1974, provision has been made for Australian Government Assistance of \$66 million over a three-year period.