



File 15.

PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

17 MAY 1978

ASSISTANCE TO CATTLE PRODUCERS
AFFECTED BY BLUETONGUE VIRUS

The Prime Minister has written to the State Premiers seeking their agreement to sharing the cost of a number of measures to assist cattle producers financially affected by bluetongue control measures. The Minister for the Northern Territory has written to the Majority Leader of the Legislative Assembly extending a similar cost-sharing proposal to operate from 1 July 1978. Assistance costs in the Northern Territory in 1977/78 will be met by the Commonwealth.

It is important that producers' incomes not be eroded any further as a result of control measures imposed by Commonwealth and State animal health authorities.

The Prime Minister outlined the program of financial assistance that has been proposed to the States, and the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. The proposed assistance measures comprise:

- payments to offset mustering costs during 1978 and for movement of stock in control areas in the Cape York Peninsula, the Northern Territory and the Kimberleys. This assistance would be at the rate of \$3 per head with a maximum of \$3,000 per property.
- payments to compensate for costs of blood testing of cattle at the rate of \$5 per head for survey and surveillance testing and \$10 per head for movement testing.
- provision of funds in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia for the urgent acquisition of virology laboratory equipment.

The assistance proposed by the Commonwealth is dependent upon agreement of the relevant States to share costs on a dollar for dollar basis and to undertake administration of this scheme.

The Prime Minister has asked Premiers to respond to the Commonwealth Government's offer as a matter of urgency.