



# PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

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ADDRESS AT OPENING MAROOCHY SHIRE COUNCIL BUILDING, NAMBOUR

This is the first opportunity I have had to visit Nambour as Prime Minister and I must say I am delighted to be here in the heart of the Sunshine Coast. This area is, of course, one of the major growing tourist centres in Australia - with now over one million visitors a year, and having enjoyed just last week a few days of Queensland sunshine, I can well understand why tourists are flocking here in such numbers.

This fine modern building is a symbol of the dynamism and development of this area. This district has become a productive, thriving area because people have worked to make it so. Further south, you can come across some sectional interests who preach gloom and doom about Australia's future. But they underestimate the drive and initiative of communities like this throughout Australia, and if they are not convinced of that simple truth, let them come to the Sunshine Coast to see for themselves.

The Federal Government has been able to add its help to the growth of this area. The Government has significantly increased funds for roads outside the metropolitan areas and this Shire has benefitted from that policy.

The upgrading of the national road system connecting the largest cities is entirely funded by the Commonwealth, and part of these funds are being devoted to the further duplication of the Bruce Highway north from Brisbane. But our road systems - like so many of the basic services we all enjoy - are in most respects the final responsibility of local municipal authorities.

It is vital that local government has access to the funds necessary to carry out its tasks effectively. Local government finances have been transformed in the past two years by the Government's tax-sharing arrangements which guarantee a fixed share of income tax revenue for local shires and municipalities.

Such revenues are untied. Local government is free to set its own priorities and spend the funds as it thinks best. Furthermore, all councils share in these grants. The scheme implemented by the previous government was highly selective. In 1974/75 and 1975/76, Maroochy Shire did not receive a single grant. Since the introduction of the new tax sharing arrangements, the Shire has received a substantial grant each year. This year it amounts to over \$330,000.

Our Federalism policies have not only increased the financial strength of local government. The status and recognition of local government as an integral part of our Federal system has also been enhanced, principally through local government representation on the Advisory Council for Inter-government Relations which met for the first time in June last year.

The Advisory Council is making a most valuable contribution in improving coordination and cooperation between the Commonwealth, State and local government, and Queensland is represented on the Advisory Council by the President of the Local Government Association of Queensland, Councillor Fred Rogers, who comes from the Moreton Shire Council, not all that far from here.

I am particularly pleased to be able to open this new administration building because it will not merely provide better facilities for the staff and ratepayers of this Shire. It will also house a new regional office for the Department of Social Security.

I know many of you have been urging successive governments for years to site a regional office here, instead of servicing this region from Brisbane. Now, at long last, a regional office with a staff of over thirty will service the 60,000 permanent residents of this region. This on-the-spot service should enable the Department to provide a more effective and efficient service and I would hope that this exercise in decentralisation can be repeated elsewhere.

I congratulate everyone who has helped to make this building a reality. I have much pleasure in declaring the Maroochy Shire Council's new administration block officially open.

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