

PRIME MINISTER AND MR. VINER INTERVIEWED: FOLLOWING PREMIER'S
CONFERENCE MEETING

Prime Minister

We haven't got onto financial matters yet, but we have had a very good discussion this morning on a range of subjects of great importance to the Commonwealth and to the States. We spent a good time discussing the energy statement and the policy document that was issued yesterday. The States and the Commonwealth will be co-operating very fully on a very wide range of energy matters and establishing special liaison arrangements to make sure that we all, as actively as possible, are pursuing the policies that will best look after Australia's own energy position.

There are a wide range of matters involved - conservation, the alternative uses of energy. There was a particular appreciation expressed for the decisions the Commonwealth has made that will link up the Bass Strait and Cooper Basin gas fields through Wagga initially, and then from Wagga to Albury.

In addition, the Commonwealth policy of purchasing gas-fired cars in future I think is probably likely to be followed by the States.

I was also very glad to see that all the States, where it is relevant, have indicated that they are prepared to re-examine the lead content rules and the emission rules in relation to the third stage of 27A. Because while one or two Premiers have their problems in relation to that, they also recognise that it is within our capacity by administrative means, to save up to 10 percent of the fuel that would otherwise be used by Australian motorists.

Against the background of Australia's own fuel position, and against the background of the world supply situation, that 10 percent could be a very large amount of fuel.

The Commonwealth will be pursuing with individual States one or two matters of great importance. In particular with Queensland the development of the Rundle shale oil deposits. There is the possibility there of developing processes that will provide as much fuel oil to Australia as is available from Bass Strait. That's one of the prospects. Quite clearly there will be a massive development and the sooner that can begin, the better it will be.

We will be having discussions with the Queensland Government to see if that matter can be processed more quickly than would otherwise be the case.

Prime Minister (continued)

We also had a very productive discussion on industrial relations and Ian Viner will say something about that. Contrary to some of the speculation, and contrary to one or two reported comments over the last few days, there is a very ready co-operation with the Premiers and the Commonwealth to discuss and analyse this particular matter.

Question

...referral of powers?

Mr. Viner

What all the Premiers have agreed to is that the Ministers for Labour and the Attorneys-General should look at whether or not there are any fundamental changes necessary to the industrial laws of Australia. The question of referral of powers will be one matter that will be looked at, but only one of a whole range of things. I think the Premiers recognise that there are signs of a breakdown of our industrial relations system in Australia, with troubles in Western Australia, in N.S.W. in particular, and there are a number of other widespread stoppages and disputes going on at the present time. The important thing is that the Premiers recognise that we need to go back to fundamentals and have a look at our whole industrial relations system -- both as to law and also as to attitudes; what are our attitudes towards industrial relations in Australia? That will involve consultation with the ACTU, with employer groups - the Confederation of Australian Industry - and of course, with all the States. We have also agreed that the Ministers and the Attorneys-General should be in a position to report back to a Premiers Conference later in the year, by the end of the year.

Question

Was there any mention of referral of powers this morning? Did you sound the States out on that issue?

Mr. Viner

It was discussed. The question was raised. Obviously, some of the States have misgivings about a referral of power, but none of the States refused to consider that as a possibility, but as I have said, as only one part of the examination of the fundamentals of the system.

Question

None of them said it wasn't on?

Mr. Viner

Well, it was only mentioned by some of the Premiers and as part of a general package of the sort of thing that we ought to look at. We didn't ask them whether they agreed or didn't agree.

Question

Would you like to see tougher penal sanctions against strikers?

Mr. Viner

That wasn't raised this morning.

Question

When will you be getting down to the Loans Council and the real business of money?

Prime Minister

Fairly shortly. But these other things are important. They shouldn't be regarded as unreal business.

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