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LARGE

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

20 SEPTEMBER 1979

COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

For the information of Honourable Members, I present the final report of the Committee on Official Establishments and seek leave to make a statement on the report.

Honourable Members may recall that the Interim Report of the Committee was tabled in May 1977.

This independent committee was appointed by the Government in September 1976 to advise on the operation, conservation and longer term development of the four official residences of the Commonwealth Government - Government House and the Lodge in Canberra, and Admiralty House and Kirribilli House in Sydney.

The Chairman of the Committee was Mr Andrew Grimwade, and its other members were Mr Guilford Bell, Dame Helen Blaxland, the Honourable James Cope, and Mrs Ruth Gullett.

I wish to thank Mr Grimwade and all the members of the Committee for their work which has involved a considerable sacrifice of their own time.

The four establishments are official residences serving the ongoing needs of Government. The buildings have already been declared part of the national estate and are well worthwhile preserving as symbolic items in our country's history and cultural heritage.

Already these four residences contain significant items of Australiana which include pieces of early Australian furniture and works of art. For example, a short while ago a notable portrait of Mr Watson, the first Labor Prime Minister, came into possession of the Australiana Fund, and that now hangs in the Lodge.

The report recommends that there be continuing machinery in the form of a permanent advisory trust to be responsible for advice to Government on the conservation, development and efficient operation of the buildings and grounds of the official establishments.

The Government agrees that such continuing machinery is necessary and is establishing a permanent body to be known as the Official Establishments Trust. Most of the other recommendations of the Committee have been accepted.

Included in these is the proposal that the trust evaluate which of two sites is the more appropriate for a possible new Prime Ministerial residence, which one day may be necessary.

So that the second site may be released for other purposes, the Government is asking the new trust to advise, as soon as possible, which of the two sites is the more suitable.

I emphasise that no decision has been taken to build a new Prime Ministerial residence.

The present Lodge is serving its function well and is expected to continue to do so for a long time to come.

A few of the Committee's recommendations will be referred to the permanent body for further consideration. These cover suggested working arrangements in the financial area and require further consideration before decisions are reached.

The Government has decided not to accept recommendations that future planning for Government House be based on eventual demolition of existing structures other than the historic stables.

Nor does it accept at this time the proposal that official establishment facilities be provided in Melbourne. Both proposals would involve expenditure outlay which the Government sees as inconsistent with the general restraint it is currently maintaining on its spending.

Implementation of the recommendations accepted will, of course, be subject to examination and funds approval in the normal budgetary processes.

I seek leave to table, for the information of Honourable Members, a listing of those recommendations accepted, those rejected, and those to be referred to the new permanent body.

Once again, I thank the Committee for their work. As a result of their efforts the Government now has a firm basis on which to plan for the conservation and future development of the official establishments, an important part of Australia's heritage.

I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, Mr Andrew Grimwade as Chairman, Mr Guilford Bell, Dame Helen Blaxland, the Honourable James Cope, and Mrs Ruth Gullett have agreed to become the inaugural members of the Official Establishments Trust.