



EMBARGO: AGAINST DELIVERY
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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

WEDNESDAY, 13 AUGUST, 1980

OPENING OF EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL, NEW HEADQUARTERS, MORUYA, N.S.W.

Thank you for the invitation to be with you on this important occasion. And thank you also, for your warm and generous welcome.

I am told it is more than a generation since you were visited by a Prime Minister, and I am certainly pleased to renew the association. You need no telling that this is a favourite refuge for Canberra visitors during weekends and holidays. Since many of your visitors are public servants, escaping the hard grind of government, perhaps I should claim some credit for your tourist boom. But I suspect the popularity of the area has much more to do with its great natural beauty and the amenities which serve the community so well. Now, to these amenities is added this new Shire Headquarters, climaxing a long and sustained period of development in Eurobodalla Shire.

Economic growth and development are important elements to our future well-being as a nation; and it is a delight to be here in one of the fastest growing shires in New South Wales. I know that this growth has placed great demands on local government administration. It has called for additional services - water, sewerage, roads and bridges. And these have been provided. But the Commonwealth's commitment to local government is not based solely on the ability of local authorities to provide efficient services.

In a country of Australia's size, local government is essential for the development of community identity. They are very often the driving force behind community spirit. And it is this identification with the community that enables local government to be responsive to community needs. These needs cannot be adequately met by remote and bureaucratic structures. They almost always depend for their solution on local understanding and local action. That is why my Government is dedicated to the decentralisation of decision-making, especially in decisions involving local government.

We are committed to the creation of a genuine partnership between Federal, State and local government; and we have translated that commitment into action. In 1976, we introduced legislation to give both the States and local government a guaranteed share of personal income tax, without strings attached.

Last year, we increased the local government share from the original 1.52% to 1.75%. Now we have raised it to 2%, fulfilling an undertaking that I gave before the last election.

Last week, the Secretary of the Local Government Association of New South Wales, described the measure as, "the most significant financial development in local government this century." In money terms, this has meant an increase in general purpose assistance to local government from about \$80 million in 1975-76, to over \$300 million this year.

And it means a very great deal more in terms of local government being master of its own affairs, not simply an arm of State or Federal Government. It enables local authorities to plan ahead with assurance, and to choose their own priorities.

I know that road development is an issue of real concern to local authorities, and I know also that your concern is even greater, dependent as you are almost wholly on road transport. The Commonwealth views Australia's road development as a matter of high priority. At the recent Premiers' Conference, we announced that \$3.65 billion would be provided in grants to the States and the Northern Territory for roadworks during the next five years. And we have effected a significant shift in emphasis towards local road funding.

In 1975-76 this occupied about 18% of the total allocation for roads. In the coming year, local road funding stands at 24% of the total Commonwealth provision. Of course, your ultimate fate is in the hands of the New South Wales Government, and I hope your representations there receive a sympathetic hearing.

The Commonwealth has always been pleased to play its role in the provision of very important services arising out of local growth and development. As a result, out of a total cost of \$1.45 million for the Eurobodalla Shire Nursing Home at Dalmeny, we will contribute \$900,000. I understand the site for the home has been chosen and that planning is well advanced. I wish that venture every success.

All this activity reflects the strength of community commitment within this area. It reflects favourably indeed, on the strength of your local administration. I commend the President and his Councillors on their continuing capacity to keep pace with development.

This new Shire facility is an appropriate symbol of the extent of that capacity. It is a credit to you all that the project has been possible through your own initiative and, more importantly, your own finance.

The offices are certainly a far cry from the original Council Chambers built nearly 70 years ago when Moruya was just a small coastal township serving a pastoral and fishing region. Of course, as Eurobodalla developed, additions were built and adjoining houses were purchased.

But almost three years ago you felt that you had simply outgrown the original facilities. I am more than familiar with the problem of working in a building that was designed for a different era. I am also looking forward to new headquarters, but they are a few years off yet.

I congratulate you on the sense of purpose that has enabled these offices to be functional within three years of setting up a sub-committee to investigate the project. This fine new building is a confident investment in the continued growth and prosperity of this area. I am sure your confidence is well founded.

Thank you again for inviting me to be present for this important occasion. I have great pleasure in declaring your new Eurobodalla Shire Headquarters officially open.

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