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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

WEDNESDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 1982

JOINT STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER AND MR LAURIE SHORT,
NATIONAL SECRETARY OF THE FEDERATED IRONWORKERS ASSOCIATION

Discussions were held today between the Prime Minister and senior Ministers and a delegation from the Federated Ironworkers Association.

The FIA delegation comprised:

Mr Laurie Short, National Secretary
Mr Joe Caesar, National President
Mr Harry Hurrell, Assistant National Secretary
Mr Bill Hopkins, National Vice-President
Mr Peter Kelly, Director, Public Affairs

As a result of a request put today by the Federated Ironworkers Association, the Government has decided that an Industry Council will be established, to advise the Government on matters affecting the iron and steel industry in Australia.

The new Council will be chaired by either the Minister for Industry and Commerce or the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, depending on the issues before it at particular times.

The FIA will be putting its view to the Government concerning membership and terms of reference for the council.

The Government, for its part, will be seeking urgently the views of the ACTU and the industry concerning the Council's membership and terms of reference with a view to conducting the first meeting of the Council as soon as possible.

It was accepted by both the FIA and the Government that a long period of restructuring will be necessary if Australia is to have a viable, efficient and profitable steel industry. It is the view of both the Association and the Government that, with plentiful supplies of iron ore and coal in Australia, there should be a strong and viable steel industry in this country. This is a firm objective of the Government.

A great deal has to be done by all parties concerned to overcome the industry's current difficulties and to establish firmly the future viability of the industry.

The Government informed the Association that it has made its decision in relation to the recent TAA Report, and that the decision could not be varied without further reference to either the IAC or to the TAA. If the industry made out a case for a further reference to the TAA to the Department of Industry and Commerce, the Government would examine any such case as a matter of urgency.

It was apparent from the discussions that there were differing perceptions by the Government and the FIA as to the reasons for the redundancies announced yesterday by BHP. It was agreed that this was a matter that required clarification, and that it would be discussed at the first meeting of the industry council.

The Government indicated to the FIA that its objective would be to have the membership and terms of reference of the new Council established to enable its first meeting to be held as quickly as possible, but certainly within a month.

That meeting would, therefore, be held before any of the redundancies announced by BHP begin to be put into effect. The Government would also be seeking the views of the unions and the industry regarding those matters that ought to be listed on the first agenda at that meeting.

It was noted that the report of the IAC into long term assistance to the steel industry is currently due in May of next year. The Government will examine the feasibility of that report being made available earlier. It was also noted that when the IAC's draft report becomes available it would be the subject of consideration by the Industry Council.

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