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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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NEW CALEDONIA

The Prime Minister, Mr Hawke today welcomed the apparent easing of tensions in New Caledonia and the recent initiative by the new French High Commissioner, M. Pisani, to enter into formal discussions with the principal political groups in the territory. These discussions are to commence tomorrow, 15 December. Mr Hawke expressed the hope that these talks will prove constructive in developing a peaceful solution to the political future of New Caledonia.

Mr Hawke paid tribute to the wisdom and statemanship shown by the FLNKS leader, M. Tjibaou, in agreeing to lift road blocks in the territory and to participate in talks with M. Pisani, despite the personal tragedy M. Tjibaou suffered in the recent outbreaks of violence.

Mr Hawke said that Australia along with all Forum members would continue to take a close interest in developments in New Caledonia. He noted that it had been decided that the Forum Ministerial Group on New Caledonia, established at the Tuvalu Forum in August 1984, would meet in Wellington next week to review developments in New Caledonia and to report to all Forum heads of government on their deliberations.

Australia's views on New Caledonia are well known and were most recently enunciated by Mr Hayden in his statement of 27 November.