

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
J. McEWEN, M.P., AT CANBERRA ON THURSDAY, 14TH MAY, 1959, AT 5 P.M.

- QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, have you had any communication from the British Government yet on the use of Woomera for space research for launching satellites?
- MR. McEWEN: Yes. I think we can say that we know of the British Government's plans, which have not reached the point of planning projection yet - planning the instrument-carrying device. Well, we are in Woomera in partnership with the U.K. Government. I don't think the point has been reached at which there is any necessity, I believe, to decide where this operation would take place. But if, for this instrument-carrying device, Woomera were judged to be the right place, of course, I have no doubt we would be completely co-operative.
- QUESTION: Well, anyway, it has been made clear to the British Government that if they wish to use Woomera for this, they can do so?
- MR. McEWEN: I think it is clear; it does not have to be made clear - if that isn't too Irish.
- QUESTION: The Americans put up a proposal some time ago that they might be allowed to increase the tracking facilities at Woomera. Has anything happened on that?
- MR. McEWEN: I can't answer with detailed precision, but, to the extent that the Americans want to establish tracking facilities here, there would be complete co-operation here.
- QUESTION: Following the visit last week of the Lockheed and Northrop people to speak to our Defence people, can you say whether the Government is looking to making a decision about these various matters on aircraft replacement, say, within any specific time? Have they got any time period that they are thinking of, in which they are looking to come to a point on it?
- MR. McEWEN: I don't think it can be said that they have a precise date decided. But these things, clearly, take so long to mature that I think it can be said that the appropriate defence authorities are studying what type of aircraft will replace the current type.
- QUESTION: You would not say that they were looking to being ready to be clear in their own minds, say, in two months or three months or any period such as that?
- MR. McEWEN: I would think not so in so narrow a bracket of time as that; no.
- QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, this week - in the last few days - the Minister for Civil Aviation introduced a Bill, which has now been shelved, about airport controls and drinking liquor and so on. Can you give us any guidance about the Government's intentions about that matter?
- MR. McEWEN: Well, I think that the frank answer is that the Government believed, particularly in respect of international travel, that it was desirable that we should have facilities that are common in today's world for international travellers. And the legislation that was introduced conforms to that general

objective. Well, it is common knowledge that it did not find favour in its existing form in the Senate, and the Government has withdrawn it in deference to the Senate and will re-study the situation.

QUESTION: It is abandoned?

MR. McEWEN: No. It would be wrong to say that it is abandoned. It is not legislation - if I may remind you - that is exclusively confined to alcoholic liquor, although the searchlight was turned on alcoholic liquor in the facilities and services.

COMMENT: The business concessions.

MR. McEWEN: Well, business concessions seems to be a business enterprise. But, a packet of cigarettes - a whole variety of things that a traveller may need.

QUESTION: In shelving it, has the Government been influenced by any temperance protests - any Rechabite movement or anything like that?

MR. McEWEN: Well, that really has not arisen. I think it has been influenced by the Senators.

QUESTION: As I understood it, Sir, the basic idea behind the Bill was that it should help to make airports pay, and the Government is still holding to that principle and wants to go ahead to make airports pay by establishing franchises there in the future. Is that right?

MR. McEWEN: I would not have thought that making airports pay was a primary objective of the legislation. I think it was a service to the travelling public that was the primary thing in mind.

QUESTION: When do you hope to re-introduce it - in the Budget session?

MR. McEWEN: I would not put a point of time on something that was unacceptable in its existing form; clearly, it must become a matter of discussions. When you engage in those kind of discussions, who can put a time on it?

QUESTION: Do you mean discussions with the nine "6 o'clock closing hours" Senators?

MR. McEWEN: No.

QUESTION: Is that their objection, Sir, the time factor?

MR. McEWEN: No; I don't think it can be quite narrowed down to that. I think it is a broader objection that I don't find myself able to completely describe, but sufficient to justify some negotiations.

QUESTION: These negotiations, will they involve talks with the States? Is there any attempt, in other words, to reconcile Federal and State laws on liquor?

MR. McEWEN: Well, I think the discussions will be with the Senators. If the Senators have views on the interests of the States, that clearly would bring the whole thing into the field.

- QUESTION: In other words, you intend, if necessary, to override the States.
- MR. McEWEN: Oh no; I am not saying that. The legislation, in the form introduced, would have established on Commonwealth property - as I comprehend it - hours of trading that may, in circumstances, have been broader than the hours of the States. Although in respect of alcoholic liquor it could have been through the operation of bona fide laws in the State, it would not necessarily have meant that the concessionaire on the Commonwealth property would be operating wider than a hotel in the State could have.
- QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, is it not also true that no State Government could license any liquor sales on Commonwealth airports without the permission of the Commonwealth?
- MR. McEWEN: Yes. Well, you have the qualification without - well, I think that is true - without the permission of the Commonwealth.
- QUESTION: On another airline matter: It was reported that Cabinet this week discussed the proposal for re-organizing the routes to New Guinea. Could you tell us anything about what was proposed or what was done there?
- MR. McEWEN: I think - my memory has let me right down. (Laughter.)
- QUESTION: Is there anything you can say yet, Sir, on the Dairying Committee?
- MR. McEWEN: No; I am sorry. We are not in a position to make an announcement on the Dairying Committee. But Mr. Adermann and myself and some colleagues are really vigorously at work trying to put together the kind of committee that the Government believes to be acceptable. I think as soon as the House has gone into recess, we will have rather more time. But we have been actively at work over the last couple of weeks. The calibre of the people we want, consequent upon the importance that we attach to this committee, is not easy to pick up if you really want good people.
- QUESTION: Have you decided, Sir, how many people you will have on the committee?
- MR. McEWEN: The thinking is that we would have five people on the committee. That is our present objective. It is subject to gaining five people who would be sufficiently representative.
- QUESTION: From the various States?
- MR. McEWEN: Well, when I say "representative", I don't mean representatives of States or of interests. But I would like it to be clear - representative out of their experience and knowledge. And, clearly, this problem is so geographically wide-spread, we would want a pretty wide-spread representation to bring the actual practical knowledge to the committee.
- QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, going back to the question of defence aircraft, I got the impression that both Northrop and the other group - Lockheed - would be interested in investing money in the Australian industry, to make planes in Australia and also to use this as a service area to service SEATO. Has that proposition been put to the Government?

MR. McEWEN: Well, it has not been put to the Government qua government. It may - and I don't know - it may have been put to some level of government; it has not, certainly, been put to the Cabinet.

QUESTION: What would the reaction be to that, as a Government?

MR. McEWEN: I think the Government's reaction would have to await the particular proposition. It would, on the one hand, have its own substantive merits, as against which, we have existing aircraft manufacturing establishments here, which we would not forget exist, of course.

COMMENT: This proposal was that they would invest money in the existing aircraft.

MR. McEWEN: Oh, yes. Well, then that clearly introduces the ownership of the other aircraft interests, as well as the concern of the Government.

QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, has the Government's deliberation on the QANTAS hotel project reached any conclusions?

MR. McEWEN: No. The position is as I broadly described it last time. We have received intimations from private interests - more than one - that they would be prepared to build a hotel - to enter into an arrangement with QANTAS, etc. As QANTAS are the people who need the hotel accommodation, we have, in the first place, asked QANTAS to go into discussion with these various people. But that - I make it clear - does not mean that we have farmed the decision out to QANTAS.

QUESTION: There have been reports, following developments such as the possibly large wheat carry-over - or the much obviously large wheat carry-over - this year, and the fact that the world wheat prices, I think, as of now are somewhat below our domestic support price, that the Wheat Stabilisation Pool could run out of money in the first year of this current wheat stabilisation plan. Is that speculation on the right track. Does it look like running out of money?

MR. McEWEN: Frankly, I think it is a little too early to speculate to that extent. I have seen some evidence that in the last few weeks export wheat prices have slightly hardened, as a matter of fact. And I really think that before the Northern Hemisphere crop really comes in to sight, it is too early to speculate on values or the actualities of disposals.

QUESTION: What would be the position if it did run out of money? Would the Government then have to find the money out of its own resources to meet its commitments under the 100 million bushels?

MR. McEWEN: That's right. That is the provision of the Wheat Stabilisation legislation. The wheatgrowers have to put up to a certain formula their own money. When that runs out, or if that runs out, the Treasury stands behind the guarantee. The quid pro quo, of course, has been that the wheat industry has agreed to sell to the Australian public at cost of production during the last - what is it? - more than ten years. In fact, the selling price to the Australian public would be much more than £100 million less than the selling price would have been during that period if it had been export parity.

QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, coming back to the QANTAS hotel: Are these groups that you mentioned Sydney groups?

MR. McEWEN: Not only Sydney groups.

QUESTION: Could you give an indication from where they do come?

MR. McEWEN: I was just thinking of ethics. If you will let me pause for a moment. I think I can say frankly - no, I won't identify them. People who write to me and make a proposition - no, I won't reveal them.

QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, will there be any further re-examination of the New Guinea tax proposals as a result of the deputation that saw you today?

MR. McEWEN: Yes. Mr. Holt, Mr. Hasluck and I met the deputation. We have heard in considerable length and detail certain criticisms. We have undertaken to consult our colleagues, which may not involve a full and formal meeting of the Cabinet, but an effective consultation on what has been said. It broadly involves two considerations, I think: First, a request that there be a deferment of the introduction, or, alternatively, that there be some modifications in detail of the Bill before the House. And those are the two things that the Government will have to - the Ministers will have to consider.

QUESTION: No suggestion to drop it altogether - from the deputation.

MR. McEWEN: I think it would be an exaggeration to say it was suggested to drop it altogether. I think that the most extreme suggestion was that we should hold it up, pending a public enquiry; that was the most extreme suggestion.

QUESTION: Is there any possibility of a public enquiry, Sir?

MR. McEWEN: Well, that would be to pre-judge the consultations with my colleagues to say so.

QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, have you a date in mind for the resumption of Parliament?

MR. McEWEN: I think Mr. Holt has announced something of the Budget, hasn't he?

COMMENT: Not a firm date that I am aware of.

QUESTION: For the Premiers' Conference, Sir?

MR. McEWEN: I'm sorry. I thought you said "the resumption of Parliament". No, not a firm date, no.

QUESTION: Mr. Holt, this morning, appeared to have some hope of income tax cuts in the next Budget. Do you share that hope?

MR. McEWEN: Well, I find hope is cheap and encouraging. (Laughter.) But I could not be more explicit than that.

QUESTION: Can you say when Cabinet will have its first meeting on the Budget?

MR. McEWEN: No, I can't say precisely; but I think we have to get the Premiers' Conference and the Loan Council behind us before we can fix the date of that.

QUESTION: The Premiers' Conference and the Loan Council - how soon?

MR. McEWEN: Well - in a month to six weeks, I think.

QUESTION: Is there any Cabinet thinking at this stage on the Budget?

MR. McEWEN: I wouldn't be surprised.

QUESTION: On that, Sir, is it true that you are all quite happy about the prospects of revenue increasing in the coming financial year on the existing rates. In other words, there was a period, I gather, when it looked as though revenue might fall again, but now, because of the increase in wool prices and so on, it looks as though revenue will be increasing.

MR. McEWEN: I think I would be correct in saying that the thinking is that the level of economic activity is pretty stable now and it is that which indicates the revenue that current rates - - -

QUESTION: Would it be up higher in the 59/60 than they are now?

MR. McEWEN: Well, the trend at the same level of activity with a growing population and so on, it tends always to increase proportionately.

QUESTION: That alone could be encouraging, couldn't it?

MR. McEWEN: The liabilities tend to increase commensurately, you know.

QUESTION: A rather more domestic question: I understand there was a luncheon between the Cabinet and the Liberal backbenchers. Was that your idea?

MR. McEWEN: Oh no, it was not; and your fact really is not right.

QUESTION: Isn't it?

MR. McEWEN: No. The Liberal Ministers gave a luncheon to the Liberal Party. The Country Party was not so liberal as the Liberal Party; the Country Party gave a dinner to the Country Party the other evening.

QUESTION: A sort of end-of-session party, was it?

MR. McEWEN: Just that, yes. We had a get-together; we had a buffet dinner on Tuesday evening; and the Liberals had a luncheon today.

QUESTION: Do you know whether you will be tabling this Economic Survey thing to-night?

MR. McEWEN: It will be tabled to-night.

QUESTION: Mr. McEwen, with reference to the Foreign Ministers' Conference taking place at Geneva, can you say whether the Government, at this stage, hopes or believes that it will lead to a Summit Conference?

MR. McEWEN: I think that the Government has always hoped that a foundation would be established which would justify a Summit Conference.

With the compliments of:
HUGH DASH,
PRESS SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER.