

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON
REPORT OF THE NATIONAL RADIATION ADVISORY
COMMITTEE.

In tabling this Second Annual Report of the National Radiation Advisory Committee, I do not wish to say a great deal because the report speaks most ably for itself. The members of this Committee are, as you know, among the most eminent scientists in this country, so that what they have to say in this report must carry great weight. The report is expressed in the most simple lay language and the story it tells is enormously reassuring. We have, as the report says, been fed a diet of news and reports about radiation and its hazards which, to say the least, has been alarming. It is cheering then to learn from these eminent scientists that their painstaking investigations over the last year have shown that Australia is one of the "cleanest" countries in the world. Indeed, to take a case, the report establishes that the average accumulation of strontium 90 in Australian soils in August, 1958, was about one third of that found in the United Kingdom, one fourth of that found in most areas of the United States, and only one seventh of that in the mid-western United States. The report goes on to say that the maximum permissible concentration of strontium 90 in the human body laid down by the Committee of the International Commission on Radiological Protection is 110 times greater than the concentration measured in Australian infants and 660 times that in adults.

These are only two examples which I have culled from this report. I commend the whole text to you so that you may make your own evaluation of the "scare" stories to which we have been subjected.

Two other points in the report to which I feel I should refer concern the use of x-rays in medical practice and the whole question of control of ionizing radiation.

Concerning the use of x-rays in medicine, the Committee has pointed out in its previous report the dangers that can be associated with the use of x-rays. In this report they repeat their warnings, but also refer again to the equal dangers which could obtain if public alarm became so great that people were to become unwilling to avail themselves of the necessary use of x-rays in medical practice. I mention this point because I feel that it should be underlined so that people will not subject themselves unnecessarily to even greater dangers through not using this important aid to medical practice.

So far as the control of the uses of ionizing radiation is concerned, the Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government should accept responsibility for the legislative control of all uses of ionizing radiation throughout Australia. Honourable Members will understand that this presents constitutional problems as well as other problems, but the Committee's recommendation will be considered by the Government and discussed with the States.

The Committee also reports the resignation of Sir Macfarlane Burnet who has been Chairman of the Committee since its inception. Sir Macfarlane has found that increasing personal commitments make it impossible for him to continue on the Committee. However, Honourable Members well know the contributions he has made to the Committee already have been of outstanding value. I venture to say that only his great sense of public duty has made him find the time which he has already devoted to the work of the Committee. In a period when, with all the great modern developments of this nuclear age, we have been alarmed by conflicting stories of dangers of radiation, Australia owes much to Sir Macfarlane (and, of course, to the other members of the Committee) for the work put into this and the previous report.
