

UNITED KINGDOM AND EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

The British Government has now made a momentous decision to enter into negotiations with the Members of the European Economic Community with a view to joining the Community if satisfactory arrangements can be made to meet the special needs of the United Kingdom, of the Commonwealth, and of the European Free Trade Association. A second, and more momentous decision will become necessary when the negotiations conclude and further consultation takes place, as it no doubt will, with the other Commonwealth countries.

I had been made aware, through messages from the British Prime Minister, of the decision of the British Government prior to the announcement in the House of Commons. Mr. Macmillan's messages to me covered both the terms of his Government's decision and also the considerations which led his Government to it.

The issues for Australia are pressing and real. We will, I hope, with the assistance of Great Britain, be participants in a series of negotiations which I believe to be the most important, in time of peace, in my lifetime. They will demand of us both wisdom and patience and our constant vigilance.

On the commercial side we have taken the view and have expressed it strongly, that in the negotiations which will now take place arrangements to protect our export trade and commercial interests must be secured. To this end further consultations of a detailed character on trade and commodity questions will take place between the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries, including Australia, before substantive negotiations with the European Economic Community begin. When those substantive negotiations do begin we will persist in the presentation of our view that nobody can argue the case for our export industries half so well as we can ourselves.

One of the things Great Britain had to decide is whether in fact her membership of the Common Market would strengthen her own economy. It is tremendously important to us that her economy should be strengthened, because if it weakens our own British market will suffer.

With respect to preferences we have special arrangements which are of immense value to us and we regard ourselves as the Australian Government as having a primary duty to protect those interests. Therefore we have devoted much time to discussing them and to pointing out that you cannot turn a preferential system upside down without exposing our export industries such as wheat, butter, dried fruits etc. to very great danger.

We have also felt that if the United Kingdom were to join the Community it would not be without effect on the close and individual political relations which characterize the Commonwealth. The European Economic Community, besides being a commercial arrangement, is also a great political conception, working towards something resembling a common political organism. It could be a tremendous thing for the world to have a cohesive Europe, but if this common European policy develops with United Kingdom participation one could hardly say that the Commonwealth would remain quite the same. I hope that I may be wrong, but so it seems to me.

I will make a statement to the Parliament as soon as possible after it assembles on August 15th. An opportunity will be given at that time to debate these important issues in terms of Commonwealth relations and in terms of our trade and economic interests.

CANBERRA,

31st July, 1961.