

PRIME MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

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

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, after consulting all Commonwealth Prime Ministers, has convened a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London on 10th September to give further consideration to proposals which are expected by that time to have been formulated concerning Britain's application to join the Common Market.

This is clearly not an ideal date from the point of view of Australia as the Budget Session will be in progress. But since it suited a majority we felt that we could not maintain an objection. I have no doubt that adequate Parliamentary arrangements can be made for our effective representation. I will discuss this with Mr. McEwen who has just completed a series of important discussions in Britain and Europe and will, on his return be reporting to the Government on them.

The essential thing about the Prime Ministers' Conference on the Common Market is that it should not occur after minds have been made up but should present the Prime Ministers with an effective opportunity of influencing the ultimate decision.

We have, of course, been most active in this matter and will continue to be so in the period between now and September. From the time the British entry into the Common Market was first mooted, we have been seized with the need to secure an effective voice for Australia in all the discussions involving our vital trade interests. A special Committee of Cabinet has had developments constantly under review and we have made repeated representations to Britain and to the Six so that they might be fully cognisant of the nature and extent of Australian interests, and of our proposals for protecting these interests. At the outset we asked Britain to seek with the Six an opportunity for us to state our case directly when matters of concern to us are involved. Since the initial discussions were opened with Mr. Duncan Sandys about a year ago this has been a main objective. We have pursued it in our discussions with British Ministers, through our Ambassadors in the countries concerned, in meetings between officials, and in a whole series of formal exchanges between Australia and the Governments of the Six and Britain. These efforts have been reinforced by the approaches which Mr. McEwen has made during his recent round of meetings in Europe.

One result of these continuous efforts, but by no means the only one, is that an opportunity is to be afforded to Australia on 26th April to present her case to the body of senior officials of the Common Market countries and Britain in Brussels - the Deputies - which has the responsibility, under the Ministers, for detailed negotiations. As has been announced, the Australian case, covering all points of trade interest to us, will be presented to this meeting by the Permanent Head of the Commonwealth Department of Trade, Dr. W.A. Westerman. Dr. Westerman will have available for consultation in London prior to the Brussels meeting, advisers from a wide range of Australian industries whose interests are most directly affected. The work done at this meeting will be vigorously followed up.

We are well aware of the difficulties in the way of securing safeguards for Australian trade interests which we would regard as acceptable. But at least we can hope that, as a result of the efforts we have made, Australia's particular problems are now better understood and the great and grave importance of these matters to Australia better appreciated, by Britain and the Six. We shall continue to press our claims, and to make our views known, with the utmost energy. But it must be remembered that no conclusions on the terms and conditions of British entry to the Common Market can be arrived at without the agreement of the Six nations. Our task is therefore both heavy and challenging, and will continue to require constant Australian advocacy.

CANBERRA,

19th April, 1962.