

FOR PRESS :

P.M. No. 13/1964

ROYAL COMMISSION ON NAVAL DISASTER

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

We have decided that the investigation of the "VOYAGER" tragedy should be conducted by a judicial Commissioner appointed under the Royal Commission Act,

The Commissioner will be ^{the Hon.} Sir John Spicer, the Chief Judge of the Industrial Court. There is no provision under the Royal Commission Act for the appointment of assessors. The Commissioner will be assisted by Counsel who will, of course, be assisted in their turn by technical experts. The function of Counsel will be to help in the most thorough-going examination of all relevant circumstances.

My colleague, the Minister for the Navy, is discussing with the Naval Board the appointment of Counsel to represent the Board. Should any other applications be made for representation, the Commissioner will decide them.

A good deal of preliminary work will, of course, be necessary, but there will be no avoidable loss of time.

The Terms of Reference will be as follows :-

"To inquire into and report on -

- (a) the cause or causes of the collision that occurred on the tenth day of February, One thousand nine hundred and sixty-four, between the ships of our Australian Navy, "Melbourne" and "Voyager" and the resulting loss of "Voyager" and of the lives of persons on board "Voyager";
- (b) the facts and circumstances leading up to, contributing to or otherwise relating to the collision and the loss, including, so far as relevant to the cause of the collision, the nature of the exercise on which the ships were engaged and the suitability and preparedness of the ships and of their equipment and crews for that exercise; and
- (c) the facts and circumstances relating to the rescue and treatment of survivors."

These terms should enable a speedy but thorough judicial investigation to be made. No effort will be spared to bring all the facts to light so far as they relate to this most tragic event.

CANBERRA,
13th February, 1964.