

DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

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

Today the Prime Minister and Commonwealth Ministers met with the Premiers of Queensland and Western Australia to discuss means of achieving closer co-operation in the development of Northern Australia. The Commonwealth Ministers in attendance were Mr. McEwen, Mr. Holt, Senator Sir William Spooner and Mr. Barnes.

The Premiers expressed their full support for the action taken recently by the Commonwealth to make the examination of Northern Development problems the special responsibility of the Minister for National Development, and for this purpose, to establish a new Northern Division within his Department.

It was agreed that this arrangement provided the most appropriate machinery upon which to develop closer co-operation and co-ordination of activities between the two States and the Commonwealth, including the Northern Territory.

The three Governments have already demonstrated vigorous support for Northern Development and are currently engaged in projects in the area involving very large sums of money. These projects have been developed more or less ad hoc.

They include beef cattle roads in northern parts of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the reconstruction of the Mt. Isa railway, port development in the Kimberleys area of Western Australia, the brigalow lands development scheme, and the first stage of the Ord River project. These together involve expenditure, by the Commonwealth and the States, of approximately £65 million.

In considering future action, the Ministers agreed that it was desirable for the three Governments to develop continuing liaison arrangements. It was agreed that the establishment of the Northern Division of the Commonwealth Department of National Development provided the means for the development of continuing liaison between Commonwealth officers and officers of the States of Queensland and Western Australia. The task of the officers concerned will be to study all aspects of northern development for the purpose of assisting Ministers in determining what ought to be done to develop the north, how it should be done and the assessment of priorities. The manner in which the task would be approached would, of course, need to remain flexible to meet changing circumstances.

The Ministers agreed that appropriate Commonwealth and State Ministers would meet together from time to time to review progress in Northern Development, to co-ordinate thinking, and give directions to those who will be required to investigate particular proposals.

As a starting point, the Northern Development Division, in co-operation with State Officers, will prepare an assessment of the progress made with projects now in hand and of those that might warrant consideration in the future. This document, which will include some qualitative and quantitative assessment of

particular proposals, will assist Ministers in deciding what steps ought next to be taken to facilitate Northern Development.

As part of the continuing arrangement for co-operation between Commonwealth and State officials, the Premiers have each nominated a Senior State Official as Liaison Officer with the Commonwealth in Northern Development.

The Queensland officer is to be Sir James Holt, Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, and Western Australia has nominated Mr. J.E. Parker, Director of Engineering.

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CANBERRA,

7th May, 1964.