

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. HAROLD HOLT:

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL RADIATION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE NOVEMBER 1965

I lay on the table of the House the Report dated November, 1965 of the National Radiation Advisory Committee.

In pursuance of its function of advising the Commonwealth Government, through the Prime Minister, on matters concerning the effects of ionizing radiation on the Australian community, the N.R.A.C. reviewed during 1965 those matters studied by the Committee since it presented its previous Report in July, 1962.

In its present Report the Committee has concentrated its attention on fallout from nuclear tests. An assessment is made of the possible effects on health in Australia of fallout from all tests conducted to date. Proposals by France to conduct weapons tests in the South Pacific Ocean in the near future have also been considered and possible effects on health in Australia evaluated.

On the question of hazards arising from those tests already conducted, fallout monitoring programmes have continued over the Australian continent since the Committee's last Report in 1962, and the Committee has accordingly had at its disposal a most extensive body of data on the levels of fallout radioactivity in Australia. The Report presents these facts lucidly and in lay language. Appendices to the Report give the detailed technical information. Having reviewed all of the information available to it, the Committee sees no reason to amend its previous conclusion that there is no significant hazard to the

health of the Australian population now or in the future as a result of past nuclear tests.

The French Government will probably commence later this year the testing of nuclear weapons on a site being established for this purpose in the South Pacific Ocean, some 4,000 miles east of Australia. It is expected that at first the tests will involve only low yield nuclear weapons but later megaton weapons will be included. In assessing the possible position in Australia the Committee had available an analysis of the problem prepared by the Atomic Weapons Tests Safety Committee. The National Radiation Advisory Committee is satisfied that the proposed weapons tests are unlikely to lead to a significant health hazard in Australia.

I might add that this assessment is supported by the report received from Professor E.W. Titterton and Mr. J.R. Moroney of their discussions with the French authorities in Paris last December in regard to the safety measures being undertaken by the French.

The major programmes for monitoring fallout in Australia are carried out under the direction of the Atomic Weapons Tests Safety Committee; much of this work features in the Report now before you. The National Radiation Advisory Committee, being familiar with these current programmes and also with those to be implemented in relation to the proposed French tests, believes that they are adequate to provide for thorough assessment of the situation in Australia. The measurement and analysis which must be made to provide reliable information on these low levels of radioactivity is an exacting and slow process and, obviously, we cannot expect useful statements of fallout levels to be made on a day-to-day basis. However Honourable Members can be assured that adequate monitoring programmes will be implemented on a continuing basis to keep a check on the level of radioactive fallout following future tests.

CANBERRA

17th March, 1966.