

FOR PRESS

66/41

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND PHOSPHATE DEPOSITS

(Statement by the Minister for Territories,
The Hon. C.E. Barnes, M.P.)

A development programme designed to raise the output of phosphate on Christmas Island from its present level of 780,000 tons a year to 1.6M tons a year by 1968 had been approved by the Australian and New Zealand Governments, the Minister for Territories, Mr C.E. Barnes said today.

A study of the possibility of raising annual production to more than 2.5M tons would continue, he said.

Mr Barnes said that the Bureau of Mineral Resources, in collaboration with the Christmas Island Phosphate Commission, was carrying out a survey at Christmas Island to re-assess its reserves of phosphate. Although the survey was not complete a preliminary estimate was that the remaining reserves of all grades of phosphate were at least 200M tons. This was substantially greater than earlier estimates of reserves.

The development works already approved would involve extraction of lower grade deposits of phosphate in addition to the present high grade deposits.

The cost of the approved development would be approximately \$5.5M.

The lower grade deposits had previously been regarded as unsuitable for superphosphate manufacture but recent technological and other experiments had shown that some of these deposits of low phosphatic content could be treated to make them suitable for agricultural use.

An increase in the annual production rate of Christmas Island phosphate would substantially benefit the Australian fertiliser industry and would make Australia less dependent on supplies from such overseas sources as Florida, Senegal and Togoland.

Mr Barnes said that the deposits at Christmas Island, which was a Commonwealth territory, were worked by the British Phosphate Commissioners as agents for the Christmas Island Phosphate Commission. This Commission had been established in 1949 by agreement between Australia and New Zealand to work the deposits for the equal benefit of the two countries.

CANBERRA, A.C.T.

19th July, 1966.