

CIVIC LUNCHEON AT HOTEL ALLEN,

TOWNSVILLE, QUEENSLAND

29TH JULY, 1966

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Holt.

Mr Mayor, Mr Premier, Ministerial and Parliamentary Colleagues, Chief of the General Staff, Miss De Lacy and Gentlemen,

This is a very happy thought on the part of the Mayor, a very generous and hospitable thought, to have so representative a gathering of the Townsville strength, plus the many visitors who have come here for these two functions, at this pleasant luncheon gathering here today, and I do appreciate your kindness, Mr Mayor, in arranging this.

It is a notable occasion, as you rightly stress. For me, a very happy one, because we do sincerely believe in this cause of northern development, and to see manifestations in these two practical achievements - of a strengthening on the academic side with the first university in the northern part of Australia in a tropical area of Australia, and the launching of a great new military establishment, itself the outstanding establishment of its kind in a tropical area, this is a double which many municipalities, Mr Mayor, or the rural areas would certainly welcome if that good fortune came their way.

I am sorry to learn that it has brought with it some of the problems of growing pains to which you have made reference. At the three layers of government - Federal, State and Municipal government - we are all in severe financial straits. Now this doesn't add up very happily for the taxpayer, but I may comfort the taxpayer by saying that we have reached a point with some of our taxes that as we increase the tax we get less money back by way of revenue, so we don't get much encouragement to tax you more heavily when that is the way you respond to our treatment.

But I can assure you, Mr Mayor, that the Premier has already told me today of the difficulties of his own State and of one of its most important industries. I have had from the Premier of Victoria and the Premier of New South Wales signals of distress. My colleagues know of the agonies we went through a week or so back as we prepared our own Budget details, so I think we will have to go on praying for rain and the increased revenues that come from good seasons. Droughts still mean much to us in the loss of revenue, in the loss of carriage of goods by railways and the other commercial activities associated with them which affect the budgets of governments. Although we weathered the effects of this last, or current, drought remarkably well, I think in an earlier period of Australian history it would have meant economic disaster. It has nevertheless taken its toll on the economy, and we have felt some discomfiture from it.

But don't let us dwell on that rather gloomier aspect of our affairs on a day when we are able to point to developments of a constructive and positive kind in the life of this community. Townsville is a very remarkable city. I think there can be few in the Commonwealth and, indeed, few in the world which can claim greater diversity of activity and of interest. You have got your rural wealth and activity, the cattle, the sugar, the mineral wealth

that proceeds from your lead, zinc, copper and matters of that sort. You have a tourist potential second to none - I don't know any resort around the world that can so consistently live up to labels as Townsville can. I have visited several of them, and for consistency of sunny weather and pleasant climate and this accessibility to reef islands and the fishing in the area - these things help to mark this city out above almost any other that could be mentioned.

I regret to have to report one serious piece of disillusionment. Arising out of this luncheon here today, I was relishing, as no doubt several of you were, these delightful fish sticks that we have been eating for lunch and I was asking which particular reef fish this was, only to be told that these were imported fish sticks! Now, I think you've got to do something about that Mr Mayor. We claim that we have fish beyond number in the waters of the reef and it seems a contradiction in terms that that beautiful fish we relish so much and that I pursue so actively has to be replaced by imported articles eating into the trade balances of this country.

Well, Mr Mayor, you have a bright prospect ahead for this city. It is in a sense the capital of the north of Australia. It will go on from strength to strength. It will have a much more richly diversified community activity because the academic society of the university makes its own contribution to a more richly fulfilled life, and at the same time, the lively, younger, vigorous members of the Services - the Air Force and the Army stationed here - they, with that little bit of military pomp and circumstance, will add something to the diversification and enjoyment of life in a community such as this.

I hope to be able to come back year by year because I am sure that year by year, Townsville will become an increasingly attractive place to visit, and an increasingly enjoyable place in which to live and attend to one's affairs. You have a prosperous future ahead of you, and quite obviously you have in the making of a great northern city a cause for which you and your fellow councillors can labour with enthusiasm in the years ahead.

Our best wishes to you. You will be receiving such co-operation as Commonwealth and State Governments can give to you. There will be various points, particularly in relation to the university and the Service establishments at which you will be in direct contact with the Commonwealth Government. I hope we treat you kindly. If you feel we do not, then I give you direct access to the person of the Prime Minister.

So, Gentlemen, this happy occasion has been made possible by the Mayor and his colleagues. We thank them and hope that under their leadership, this will be a city of which all Australia can be truly proud.

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