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FUTURE OF SNOWY MOUNTAINS AUTHORITY

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

The Commonwealth Government has been giving a good deal of attention to the question of the future of the Snowy Mountains Authority. The major work in the Snowy Mountains area will be completed on present estimates by about 1972, and the Government hopes it will be found possible for a continuing use to be made of some of the specialised skills which the Authority can provide.

Examination has been conducted by means of studies at the official level and inter-Departmental discussion. These have, of course, included consultation with Sir William Hudson, Commissioner of the Snowy Mountains Authority, and his senior colleagues. There has been consideration by Cabinet itself. What clearly emerges is that it is mainly in the area of State works that the future collective use of the skills which the Authority has built up is likely to be found. The works programmes of the Commonwealth and notably the water resources programmes in the areas under its control offer limited scope compared with those of the States.

Before a final decision can be made about the future of the Authority, it is necessary that the Commonwealth Government should be in possession of the views of State Governments as to whether they would see a requirement within their works programmes and the funds likely to be available to them, to engage the skills of the Snowy team to the extent necessary to sustain a workable organisation. The Commonwealth's purpose would be to ascertain in general whether they would regard the continuation of the Authority as likely to serve State and Commonwealth purposes in a valuable way.

Most of the State Governments have, of course, design and constructing authorities of their own, but some, or indeed all, of them may feel that they could be considerably assisted by the services of the Authority. There have already been instances of this.

Australia is the world's driest Continent, and all Governments, State and Commonwealth, recognise that continuing progress in water conservation is essential to further expansion of production and to national development. Our recent drought experience has brought home to us all how gravely affected Australia continues to be by the lack of regular supplies of water in adequate quantities. There is much that Australia can do by its own efforts to meet its growing needs for power and water. The skills, experience and expertise of the Snowy Mountains Authority should - if the States decide to avail themselves of them - be capable of making a valuable contribution for these purposes.

We propose, therefore, to consult promptly with the State Governments on the specific question of the Authority's future. Before we can finally decide on the size, role and structure of a continuing organisation, we must have been able to assess the extent to which the States would avail themselves of the services of such an organisation.

CANBERRA,
28th August, 1966.