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ASSISTANCE TO SUGAR INDUSTRY

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

The Premier of Queensland has made strong representations to me concerning the difficult situation facing the sugar industry in Queensland and New South Wales.

Primarily this has come about through the catastrophic fall in the world free market price for sugar. This has happened at a time when the large expansion programme undertaken by the industry some years ago is coming to fruition in a big increase in sugar production.

Recognising the great importance of the sugar industry to Australia, especially as an export producer, the Commonwealth has been examining this problem earnestly and sympathetically.

It is far from being an easy problem. Although on the production side the sugar industry is unquestionably sound and efficient, and although it has shown a commendable spirit of enterprise, it is up against a world market for its product which is extremely weak and may well remain so for a considerable time to come.

In the circumstances, these quite uneconomic prices impose great financial difficulties on producers in the sugar industry and on the substantial communities in large areas in Australia which have been developed through the establishment of the sugar industry and depend on it for their livelihood. For the most part, there are no comparable alternative opportunities for production and employment in these areas.

My colleagues and I have been treating the matter as one of the greatest urgency and, in co-operation with the Queensland Government, our efforts will be continued until a solution has been found.

CANBERRA,
29th August, 1966