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QUEENSLAND FLOODS

Statement by the Acting Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon.
John McEwen

Commenting today on the floods in North Queensland, the Acting Prime Minister said that as soon as news of the disaster was received, the Government arranged for Commonwealth officials to keep in close touch with the Premier's Department in Queensland so that it could be kept fully informed of developments. At the same time, requests for assistance were received by the Services which did all they could to assist those affected by the flooding.

The Acting Prime Minister said that in accordance with the constitutional division of responsibilities, the provision of relief following natural disasters is a matter which falls within the province of the States. However, in recognition of the need on humanitarian grounds to take special action for the quick alleviation of individual cases of hardship, successive Commonwealth Governments have adopted the policy of assisting State Governments in the financing of relief schemes where the damage has been severe or widespread, but the initiative in setting up these schemes rests with the State concerned. The Commonwealth participates at the request of the State and on the basis of matching the amount of money which the State customarily makes available.

Mr. McEwen said that a telegram had been received from the Premier of Queensland on 17th March, requesting Commonwealth financial assistance and the Prime Minister telegraphed in reply to the effect that the Commonwealth is prepared to participate with the State on the customary dollar for dollar basis for the relief of personal hardship. When the Queensland Government has forwarded an assessment of damage done to other assets, the Commonwealth will give prompt consideration to the question of assistance to the State to help in financing the restoration of those assets.

Referring to suggestions that had been made in some quarters that the Commonwealth Government had acted promptly to assist in rehabilitation of the bushfire devastated area in Tasmania but had remained silent about the Queensland floods, Mr. McEwen emphasised that the Commonwealth does not enter into this field of State administration unless it is asked to do so by the Premier of the State. The help which the Commonwealth gave to Tasmania followed the request from the Premier of that State. When the assessment by the Queensland Government of the damage done by the Queensland floods has been received, the Commonwealth Government will give it the same quick consideration that it did in respect of the request which it received from Tasmania.

CANBERRA,
29th March, 1967.