

FOR PRESS

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY,
MR. JOHN McEWEN,
AT THE EXPORT DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL DINNER,
HOTEL CANBERRA, 31ST MAY, 1967



I recall when E.D.C. was established in 1958 to advise the Government on the expansion of our export trade. The thought in my mind, which had the support of the Government, was to invite a number of highly experienced, highly respected and highly competent people from the commercial world to join with a few similarly experienced officials of the Government Service.

It is fortunate for the country that those who were invited to join what became known as the Export Development Council readily accepted the call to serve the country and establish this Council under the Chairmanship of the late Sir John Allison.

Now, nine years later, no one would query a claim that it has been a most valuable adjunct both to government and to business.

The Council has been fortunate in its Chairmen. First, Sir John, then the late Sir Alfred Armstrong, and now Dave McGrath.

As exports expand, benefits should flow to those who invest in, and to those who work in, the export industries. This is essential. However, on the establishment of this Council, the basic motive in my mind was more profound than that.

The major objective was to generate for the nation a bigger earning of foreign exchange. Adequate resources of foreign exchange are an essential to national growth.

With my official advisers and my Cabinet colleagues, I join in working for the fast growth of this country, a growth built upon sound foundations. I see growth - sound growth - providing a widening level of prosperity, an assurance of job availability, and with these the basis upon which a great and continuing migration programme can be confidently embarked upon. Earnings from export represent the most natural generation of holdings of foreign currency. Without sufficient foreign exchange, no great plans for national growth could be carried through.

It was as a Council concerning itself with the earning of more foreign exchange through export that the Council was seen as essential to the grand plan of fast, sound, national growth. It has a long record of devoted service and a long record of successful achievement.

While the political government of the country can, and should, plan for growth, both the industrial growth itself and the earning of foreign exchange through export is predominantly in the field of private enterprise, not of government. So what we sought to create was a sense of partnership, the reality of partnership between the Government and its senior officials and those in private enterprise who have brought their wealth of experience and knowledge and imagination into the partnership.

To bring big business so closely into association with the administrative side of government, both at the political and at the official level, is the perfect setting to facilitate log-rolling by vested interests. From the outset we all understood that the Export Development Council was never to be a facility for the promotion of private interests, individually or collectively, through contact with the Government.

There are many things in connection with this Council of which we may all feel proud. High on the list of these things I would put the fact that there has never been an instance of the Council, its committees, or its individual members ever attempting to influence the Government at any level for purposes of individual profit. In view of the close association of so many people with government at high level and with those in government whose policy and administrative acts bear upon the profitability of business, this is something of which you can be proud.

Impartiality has been the keynote of E.D.C.'s advice. This is quite a record. I am sure it will be sustained.

We have big dreams of growth. To make these dreams come true, we have big practical requirements.

I remember saying when addressing an Export Convention in 1960 that those competent to make the calculation had satisfied me that Australia needed to lift its earnings through export to a higher level of £250 million a year within the next five years. To all who heard me quote this figure, or at least most who heard me, the figure sounded dramatically high, but to many it sounded ridiculously high. But, having estimated our need, government and private enterprise went to work to step up our income. The end result was that at the end of five years our export earnings had

increased by an annual rate, not of £250 million a year, but a rate of £500 million a year.

You would not wish me to say that all of this is attributable to the work of the Export Development Council. Of course it isn't. But the Council has a long record of identifying the things that should be done, could be done, by government or by business to improve our export record.

The Government has now for many years regularly invited those whom you choose from amongst your members to come to the Cabinet room and give the Government your advice twice a year. Policies that the Council has proposed have been adopted by the Government and have to a large extent produced the results in business which were forecast.

This leads me to say "Thank you"; and leads me further to say - YOUR WORK IS NOT DONE.

Australia's need to increase its foreign exchange earnings is as great to-day as it has ever been. What you have done is to prove that a group such as those who compose this Council can make a very valuable contribution to the sound growth of the nation. This, I believe, must produce a very satisfying feeling in all who have served on E.D.C.

Dramatic things are happening these days in Australia in the mineral fields. Expansion of lead and zinc production, a moderate industrial nation now self-sufficient in copper and with a surplus for export. The formerly depressed coal industry transformed into a bright setting. New production of tin and the revelation of our immense resources of bauxite, of iron ore, of natural gas, and now of nickel; a new confidence in oil! These are splendid discoveries and splendid developments.

Australians owe a lot to all of those who have contributed.

There are those who believe that our problem of earning sufficient foreign exchange need no longer be a worry, that the metals will solve it. True, minerals will become much more important foreign exchange earners. E.D.C's. estimate of Australia's export needs of \$5,000 million by the mid-1970's means an increase of about \$2,300 million over our current level of exports. Minerals will fill only a part of this gap.

However, let me put this issue of foreign exchange earnings in its proper perspective. Foreign exchange is a form of money. We will not be a great nation through merely being a rich nation.

Our objective, if you remember, was - fast, sound, national growth. That is, millions more people, millions more jobs, hundreds of thousands more factories and farms. The objective of earning foreign exchange was not an end in itself. It was a means towards making possible that kind of national growth.

As I see it, while the minerals are exported as such, or upgraded into metals, we will undoubtedly earn much exchange, but that alone will not create jobs by the hundreds of thousands or great industry. The kind of industries that you have been concerning yourselves with to a large extent, the farm industries, the manufacturing industries, will continue to provide the greatest basis for wealth production. Along with the tertiary industries, they will also provide the basis for job creation.

Let us salute the growth of the minerals industries, but not take this development as grounds for sitting back.

I have spoken on other occasions of our option to choose the comfort of stagnation. For my part, and I am sure for your part, we would all prefer to suffer the discomfort of growing pains, so that we may leave a nation greater and stronger than where we found it.

I give you the Toast -

"THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE TO THE NATION"

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