

TEXT OF STATEMENT ON NATIONAL TELEVISION BY
THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. JOHN McEWEN, MP

19TH DECEMBER, 1967

We all share the terrible grief which Mrs Holt and her family are suffering. On behalf of the nation I have conveyed to Mrs Holt our deepest sympathy.

It is dreadful that in the prime of his life this good, able and devoted Australian should have been taken from us.

Early this afternoon I accepted a commission from the Governor-General as Prime Minister. I have told Lord Casey that I intend to retain the office of Prime Minister until the Liberal Party has chosen for itself a new leader. I have told the Governor-General that when this has been done, it is my intention to step aside.

At my request, the Governor-General will tomorrow swear all the present Ministers in their existing portfolios.

During this period, my Government will continue with the policies and administrative processes of Mr Holt's Government.

A number of very important official persons from overseas will come to Australia to attend the Memorial Service for Mr Holt. President Johnson has already decided to come to pay his tribute. Mr Holyoake, Prime Minister of New Zealand, is coming. Indications have been received that a number of other Governments will be represented.

The very high calibre of many amongst the visitors who will have travelled tremendous distances for this Service is major tribute to the regard and respect in which our Prime Minister was held internationally. I would expect that advantage will be taken of the opportunity of their presence to have discussions on great matters of mutual interest, and I have asked my Cabinet colleagues to be available. I am very sure Mr Holt would have wished this.

We are at this time deeply involved in world events. We share with our Allies in Viet Nam the responsibilities and agonies of making it certain that aggressive communism cannot overrun a free people. We are having continuous communication with the British Government about its plans for the extent of their continuing involvement in Asia.

My Government will continue to act as a responsible and concerned member of the international community with an especial understanding for Asian people and their problems. Our involvement in defence matters is entirely related to working with like-minded people to bring about a more stable world.

On another front we are working with all our energies towards fairer international trading opportunities for all countries.

The export industries of our country today have many problems. We will press ahead with the work which Mr Holt initiated at his last Cabinet meeting to study the problems of Australia's rural industries and the devising of policies for their betterment.

There must be no interruption of the great task of developing and strengthening this land of our heritage. It is my intention, as it ever has been to make the best contribution of which I am capable to establishing strong and stable government for Australia.