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PRIME MINISTER
13 FEB 1969

WEST AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR HARBOUR STUDY

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

The Australian Government recently invited the Government of the United States to participate in carrying out a study of the technical and economic feasibility of using nuclear explosives to blast out a new deep-water harbour at Cape Keraudren on the northwest coast of Australia.

We have today received an official reply from the United States Government saying that that Government is prepared to proceed promptly, with the Australian Government, in carrying out this study which will, of course, pay full attention to all aspects of safety.

It must be emphasised that all that has been so far decided is that the feasibility study is to take place, under the direction of the United States Atomic Energy Commission, and the Australian Atomic Energy Commission, which two bodies will be put in direct contact with each other to plan and carry out the study.

It has not yet been decided that the execution of the project itself will take place. A decision on this must await the completion of the feasibility study, an examination in the light of the results of that study of the applicability or otherwise of the limited test ban treaty, and then a new decision by each Government concerned as to whether the execution of the project will take place.

On behalf of the Australian Government I warmly appreciate President Nixon's prompt and positive response to our request for assistance in carrying out this study, and welcome this new expression of Australian/American co-operation. Should the explosion itself eventually occur, it would be a historic development - the first practical application of the atom as a mighty engineering tool for civil construction, helping to open up new frontiers. All being well, it could be the forerunner of many other projects for peaceful civil engineering development in the years ahead. We have already set in motion machinery to speed the feasibility study and my colleague, the Minister for National Development (Mr. David Fairbairn) is announcing details of these measures.

CANBERRA
7 February 1969

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