

FOR PRESS

P. M. No 9/1970

BARRIER REEF

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

I have been asked about a communication received from the Queensland Government in June 1968 regarding the Barrier Reef.

In June 1968 we received a letter from the Queensland Government informing us that they intended to set up a committee, to advise the Queensland Government on the general question of the control and exploitation of all the resources of the Great Barrier Reef which were described as "fishing, tourism, scientific research, and probably mining". The Queensland Government proposed to set up a committee of eleven members and suggested the Commonwealth might nominate one member.

This general suggestion was entirely different from the present proposal which is that drilling for oil on or near the Barrier Reef be halted until a joint enquiry into possible dangers of drilling has been held, and has reported publicly to both Governments.

I have endorsed this latter proposal and indicated that if the Queensland Government will agree to it the Commonwealth would be prepared to take part in such an enquiry while drilling is suspended.

This is the question which now awaits the decision of the Queensland Government.

CANBERRA
16 January 1970