

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SPEECH

BY

The Rt Hon. J. G. GORTON, M.P.

ON

GREAT BARRIER REEF

INQUIRY INTO DRILLING FOR PETROLEUM

(Ministerial Statement)

[From the 'Parliamentary Debates', 5 May 1970]

Mr GORTON (Higgins—Prime Minister) —by leave—I am pleased to announce that the Premier of Queensland and I have agreed on the details of establishing Commonwealth and State royal commissions to inquire into the risk of damage to the Great Barrier Reef from drilling for petroleum. The royal commissions have been established under the Commonwealth's Royal Commissions Act 1902-1966 and the Queensland Commissions of Inquiry Acts 1950 to 1954. The Commissioners and the terms of reference will be identical for each royal commission. The Commissioners are: The Honourable Sir Gordon Wallace, Sydney, New South Wales, Chairman; Dr James Eric Smith, Plymouth, England; and Mr Vincent John Moroney, Calgary, Canada. The terms of reference for the royal commissions are:

- (1) Taking into account existing world technology in relation to drilling for petroleum and safety precautions relating thereto, what risk is there of an oil or gas leak in exploratory and production drilling for petroleum in the area of the Great Barrier Reef?
- (2) What would be the probable effects of such an oil or gas leak and of the subsequent remedial measures on—
 - (A) The coral reefs themselves;
 - (B) The coastline;
 - (C) The ecological and biological aspects of life in the area?

- (3) Are there localities within the area of the Great Barrier Reef and, if so, what are their geographical limits, wherein the effects of an oil or gas leak would cause so little detriment that drilling there for petroleum might be permitted?
- (4) If exploration or drilling for petroleum in any locality within the area of the Great Barrier Reef is permitted, are existing safety precautions already prescribed or otherwise laid down for that locality regarded as adequate and, if not, what conditions should be imposed before such exploration or drilling could take place?
- (5) What are the probable benefits accruing to the State of Queensland and other parts of the Commonwealth from exploration or drilling for petroleum in the area of the Great Barrier Reef and the extent of those benefits?

The area of the Great Barrier Reef referred to in the above terms of reference includes the entire area from low watermark on the mainland of Queensland to the outer line of the Reef and includes also the area outside and adjacent to the outer line of reefs. These agreed terms of reference incorporate some improvements and changes of a drafting nature from the agreed terms

announced on 29th January following the conference on that date between the Premier and myself.

The Premier and I are pleased that 3 persons of such eminence have agreed to be the Commissioners. Sir Gordon Wallace recently retired as President of the Court of Appeal of New South Wales. He had previously been a judge of the Supreme Court of that State. While at the Bar he held office as President of the New South Wales Bar Association in 1957-58 and Vice-President of the Law Council of Australia in 1957. Dr Smith is a Doctor of Science, a Fellow of the Royal Society, Director of the Plymouth Laboratory of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom, Chairman of Trustees of the British Museum of Natural History and Chairman of the Indian Ocean Biological Centre Consultative Committee. He has held teaching appointments at the Universities of Manchester, Sheffield and Cambridge and for some years was Professor of Zoology at the University of London. He has served on the Science Research Council of Great Britain and on the Council and Committees of the Royal Society of London. As Director of the Plymouth Laboratory, he organised the research undertaken by the Plymouth staff on the effects of the 'Torrey Canyon'

oil pollution on marine life. Mr Moroney is a consultant petroleum engineer with experience in problems of off-shore operations. He has had over 40 years experience with oil companies in engineering and managerial positions throughout North and South America. He graduated from the Georgetown University and is a member of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy and of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers.

The inquiry would be an open one and the royal commissioners have sufficient authority to collect any evidence required. All interested parties could appear before the commission and state their views and adduce evidence to support those views. The commissioners will make announcements on arrangements for the hearing of such evidence. Counsel assisting the royal commissions will be Mr A. E. Woodward, O.B.E., Q.C., of the Victorian Bar and Mr C. E. K. Hampson of the Queensland Bar. I present the following paper:

Great Barrier Reef, Inquiry into Drilling for Petroleum—Ministerial Statement

Dr Patterson—Will the Prime Minister move that the House take note of the paper?

Mr GORTON—Yes. I move:

That the House take note of the paper.