

FOR PRESS:

PM No 107-1970

CONSTRUCTION OF COCKBURN SOUND NAVAL BASE

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

The Government has approved plans for the construction, over five years, of the second stage of Naval Support Facilities at Cockburn Sound, Western Australia.

It is proposed to provide base facilities capable of supporting four escort vessels and three submarines for periods up to a year without dry docking.

Capital works will include the wharf and service area, dredged basin area, workshops and stores buildings, engineering services, barracks, housing, and a jetty and armament depot.

The Base will enable ships to operate in the Indian Ocean and will significantly increase the flexibility of our Naval Forces.

I am glad to say that the decision has met with warm approval in Britain and the United States.

The British Minister for Defence has sent us a message which reads "I confirm that my Government warmly welcomes your intention to establish a Naval Facility at such a strategic point, which underlines the extent to which the threat posed by the Soviet maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, and the need to keep all the sea-lanes in that area open is being recognised by the nations of the free world."

The United States Secretary of Defence has written "Your stated intention to develop a naval base in Western Australia is most welcome ----. The timeliness of a decision to move ahead with a Cockburn Sound Base is accentuated by the burgeoning Soviet interest in the Indian Ocean and its approaches."

Thus the naval construction approved as part of Australia's own defences is seen by our allies - who will be able to use the Base if they wish to - as an advancement of the common interest in contributing to security in the Indian Ocean.

CANBERRA
30 October 1970

NOTE: Text of message from Secretary Laird attached.

COCKBURN SOUND

Text of Message from Secretary Laird

The United States recognizes fully the important security contributions Australia is making to free world defense in the Southwest Pacific and Indian Ocean areas. Your stated intention to develop a Naval Base in Western Australia is most welcome.

The generous offer to open such a facility to ships of the U. S. Navy is indeed gratifying; such a base would play an important role in U. S. contingency planning for the region; and as operational requirements or opportunities may arise, we would make use of the port.

The timeliness of a decision to move ahead with a Cockburn Sound Base is accentuated by the burgeoning Soviet interest in the Indian Ocean and its approaches. The current Soviet interest in Singapore, the growing number of their vessels visiting ports of the Indian Ocean littoral, and the historic Soviet desire to exercise control over the Suez area combine to indicate that the free World's interests in the Southwest Pacific Indian Ocean area may encounter serious new challenges in the future. An Australian Naval Base at Cockburn Sound could afford a valuable position from which manifestations of such a threat could be observed and, if necessary, countered.
