

FOR PRESS:

P.M. No. 115/1970

COMMONWEALTH'S OFFER ON RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

Comment by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

There is no need for a Premiers' Conference on the offer made by the Commonwealth to tackle the problem of rural reconstruction, farm adjustment, and retraining of farmers who decide to leave the land.

This is a Commonwealth initiative and a Commonwealth offer aimed at helping the rural community in all States. If the Government of any State does not wish to join in that scheme, or to accept that offer, that is a matter for the Government of that State to explain to the rural community in that State. Those States which do accept the offer can proceed with the scheme.

It is untrue to say that yesterday's meeting of Ministers was abortive. There was unanimous agreement by all Ministers present on the basic principle of the Commonwealth approach as set out in the press release, and Commonwealth and State officers met in Canberra today to begin discussions on the details of proposals.

Furthermore, the Commonwealth does not want the States "to guarantee the financial aspects of a scheme which it promotes."

It does want a State, if it agrees to administer the scheme within a framework laid down by the Commonwealth, to accept responsibility for loss if that loss results from a State's faulty administration of monies provided by the Commonwealth.

CANBERRA
11 December 1970