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BACKGROUND TO OMEGA INSTALLATION

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr William McMahon

In reply to a question by Mr Barnard in the House of Representatives on 18 March I said that negotiations had taken place between the United States and Australian Governments on a proposal to set up an OMEGA installation in Australia to guide international shipping and other kinds of transport.

I said that we had agreed to the proposal but no precise location had yet been decided. I promised that, as soon as I had precise information which I could give to the House, I would do so.

In view, however, of continued misleading statements on the subject, I feel it would be wise to give some further background now, even though no decision has yet been made on a site.

OMEGA is a general purpose world-wide navigation system that can be used by ships and aircraft of any type fitted with the appropriate equipment; but the system is not sufficiently accurate for use either in close coastal waters or by ballistic missile submarines.

The plan envisages eight stations in various parts of the world, four of which have already been established. It is envisaged that control of the world-wide system will be vested in a body composed of representatives of each of the participating nations.

The Australian Government has agreed to this proposal in principle. A final agreement is dependent on the selection of a mutually acceptable site; conclusion of an agreement covering its establishment and operation, and the negotiation of acceptable financial terms and conditions.

Initially the technical specifications called for a valley of a certain type of configuration. On this basis the choice of sites would probably have been limited to certain areas of New South Wales or Tasmania. As a result of technical advances, however, the equipment can now be mounted on a tower and this has greatly enlarged the area and range of options. Consideration is being given to possible sites but no firm conclusion have yet been reached. When a tentative selection has been made the Government would, of course, consult with the State authority or authorities concerned.

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CANBERRA

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