

7/1/94
Mr James

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SPEECH

The Rt Hon. W. McMAHON, M.P.
Prime Minister

ON

National Film and Television Training School

[From the 'Parliamentary Debates', 26 October 1971]

Mr McMAHON (Lowe—Prime Minister)
—On 14th October, in reply to a question from the Leader of the Opposition, I undertook to look at figures concerning the proposals of the Interim Council for a National Film and Television Training School that my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts (Mr Howson) had presented to the House and at criticisms that had been made about them. I have had the matter looked into and I have studied the various statements that have been made in the House. I am satisfied that the Minister did not give to the House—to quote the Leader of the Opposition—'figures which were not accurate or estimates which were misleading'. The discussion that has taken place in the House has centred around the cost of acquiring land and whether an area of 60 acres, or an area of 8 acres, should be acquired.

In November 1969, the Government set up an Interim Council for a National Film and Television Training School. The Interim Council submitted its first report in November 1970. I table a copy of the report. In paragraph 11.4 the Council expressed the view that: 'It is not a viable proposition to set up a National Film and Television School on its own, with a student body of only limited numbers'. In paragraph 11.8 the Council said that: 'The school should be established as an independent College of Advanced Education immediately adjacent to an existing educational institution'. In paragraph 12.3 the Council suggested that an area of some 60 acres might well be required. The full

import will be apparent to members on reading the text of these paragraphs of the report.

The Interim Council submitted a second report in March this year. I table a copy of that report. In it the Council put forward a programme of action on the basis that the National Film and Television School would open up for some pupils early in 1973. In paragraph 4 of the report the Council suggested a timetable and said that—and I quote from sub-paragraph 5—'the programme as set out in the timetable is applicable whether the Government accepts the recommendation to purchase the larger area required for a Centre or a lesser area sufficient for the Film and Television School alone'. Mr Acting Speaker, it is clear that the Council was to be taken in its second report as adhering to its recommendation in the first report that an area of something like 60 acres should be acquired, although it was recognising that the Government, on its initiative, might only authorise the acquisition of a lesser area.

In June this year the Minister raised with the Council the question whether the School might not progress along rather more cautious lines than the Council had proposed. On 30th June the Minister received estimates which I now table. It will be seen from an examination of these estimates that on the basis of the acquisition of 60 acres, which was the Council's recommendation, the cost would be \$7.6m, and that on the basis of the acquisition of 8 acres the cost would be \$5.6m. I table a copy of a letter

dated 28th July 1971, addressed to the Minister by the Chairman of the Interim Council. It reads:

At the meeting of the Interim Council on Tuesday, 27th July, it was decided that I should confirm, in writing, two of the points made in our personal discussions, as being the firm views of the Interim Council.

Whilst fully recognising the present need for economies, the Council stresses that it would be self-defeating to begin the school inadequately. Although it would be possible to move more slowly than envisaged in the original reports, the Council considers the school must start off with adequate resources at each stage if it is to be developed in a worthwhile way.

The Council also is anxious to make perfectly clear that its recommendation on the purchase of the land, now available in a non-intensive subdivision, is based on the belief that the site should not be confined to the area needed solely for a Film and Television School. Other schools in associated studies are under active consideration, and their eventual close association and physical location alongside the Film School is considered of great importance to its long-term success. The opportunity to acquire the full site so advantageously will never reoccur.

I realise I have already made these points in personal discussions with you, but I agree with the Council that it is desirable that they be confirmed in writing.

On 8th September the Minister made a statement in the House in the course of which he said:

Whilst the Council's enthusiasm for this project is fully apparent from its reports, the continuing economic stringencies and the substantial cost which is estimated to be over \$7m during the next 5 years have led to consideration of its proposals being deferred for 12 months. The proposals may then be considered in the light of what I hope will be more propitious economic circumstances.

Having regard to the very recent and, I might add, firm advice that the Minister had received in Mr Coleman's letter of 28th July, the Minister was justified in treating the Council's proposals as being proposals involving the expenditure of over \$7m during the next 5 years.

There remains one matter, namely, the matter of the number of graduates, to which the Minister referred in answer to a question by the Leader of the Opposition on 10th September. The Minister gave a figure of 12 graduates. The report to the Interim Council by P. A. Management Consultants Pty Ltd reflected some doubt about the needs of industry for graduates. The report said:

'Under the assumption that present trends will continue, the number of graduates from the School that the industry believes it could absorb has been determined in the range from 30-4 graduates.'

However, on the same page the survey went on to conclude that the School should cater for an initial output of only 15 graduates a year for the industry. The Minister acknowledges that he was in error in referring to 12 graduates. The figure should have been 15. I table a copy of the consultants' report.

Mr Acting Speaker, I have stated the position in some detail, and I have tabled reports and other papers, so that the whole matter can be looked at fairly and squarely. I have done so myself and am fully satisfied with the account that the Minister has given to the House. It is true that consideration had been given by the Minister to the possibility of proceeding with the School by itself in an area of 8 acres. But that was not the Council's proposal. The Council had recommended the acquisition of 60 acres and on 28th July it affirmed that recommendation. The making of a decision was a matter for the Government. The advice of the Council was not, however, lightly to be disregarded. In all the circumstances, and in view of the economic factors to which the Minister referred in his statement of 8th September, the Government concluded that it should look at the whole question again within the next year. This the Government has undertaken to do and this it will do. I present the following papers:

National Film and Television Training School
Interim Council

First Report of November 1970,

Second Report of March 1971,

Tables of Estimates of Costs of Establishing the School,

A Survey of Employment Opportunities for Graduates of the Training School.

A copy of a letter dated 28th July 1971 from the Chairman to the Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts,

Answers by the Prime Minister to a question by the Leader of the Opposition on 14th October concerning the proposals of the Interim Council for a National Film and Television Training School, 26th October 1971.