



## PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS:

PM. No. 12/<sup>A</sup>1972.

### REPLACEMENT OF RAN DESTROYERS

Statement by Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. William McMahon, C.H., M.P.

The Prime Minister stated today that the Government proposed to examine later this year the question of replacing RAN destroyers scheduled for retirement from front line service in the late 70's and early 80's. The design and construction of these ships was an exceedingly complex and time consuming process and would have to be put in hand this year if ships were to be available in 1980.

In the meantime the Government had given consideration to the preliminary measures necessary to keep essential options open. The Government had authorised the preparation of designs for the first stage modernisation of Williamstown Dockyard. The total cost of this modernisation work, if implemented, would be \$6m. The design work would involve only a small expenditure. The modernisation of Williamstown Dockyard was necessary in any case for efficient operation of the dockyard.

Further work on the preliminary design of an Australian built destroyer is also proceeding. An amount of \$670,000 had recently been authorised to assist in collection of design and other data necessary for the decision to be made on the overall programme later in the year. The next stage would be the issue of invitations for tenders for the detailed design of the vessels. It had been decided that it would be prudent not to take this step until a firm decision had been reached to proceed with an Australian designed destroyer.

The Prime Minister emphasised the crucial importance of this project to the Navy and to Australian defence. Destroyers are the backbone of the RAN combatant fleet. Modern destroyers equipped with essential missile attack and defence systems wherever they are produced are very expensive and the total impact on the defence programme would be considerable. As the new ships will have a life extending beyond the year 2000 it was essential that a thorough examination should be completed before the Government entered into any commitment.

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CANBERRA,  
27 January, 1972.