EMBARGO: Until 10.00 am 23/2/1972 CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PRIME MINISTER

SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM

23 February 1972

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr William McMahon, C.H., M.P.

On behalf of the Australian Government I welcome you to Canberra for the Second Session of the South Pacific Forum. Most of you have been here before, but this is the first time we meet together in Australia as neighbours and friends to discuss matters of common interest.

During my period of office as Foreign Minister, I wholeheartedly supported the concept so I have a direct personal interest in the Forum. Obviously there was a need for a forum for political discussions as well as discussions about other matters of common interest. In short we need a forum such as this. And I recommended to my colleagues we should identify ourselves with the Forum when it was set up. I assure you we will co-operate in every way we can. We share a common purpose for peace, security and progress in the South Pacific Region and our destinies are permanently linked in many ways.

Historically, the first links were forged when Captain Cook explored the Pacific two hundred years ago. He then established links between Australia, New Zealand and the Islands which have increasingly brought us closer together in friendship and trade. And, we share the conviction that independence, freedom and security are the rights of our peoples. We are all involved in the hectic movement of political and economic change that marks our time. This helps to strengthen our relationships and gives us a regional identity in the wider world beyond the South Pacific. And like you, we are busy with the adventure of nation building, economic development and social progress. We possess in common the tradition of parliamentary democracy and a community of interest in the ties and institutional patterns of the British Commonwealth. But we recognise, too, a wider Pacific community with which each of us is already linked in the South Pacific Commission.

This Forum has, in a sense, other and wider political interests to pursue. Equally it is able to build on our experience of co-operation and adaptation to change which has marked the twenty-five years of the Commission. We live in an era of aroused expectations, stimulated by the ease of travel and the spread of communications - in a world where every Government has to chart a course and navigate according to its assessment of its own best interests. But none of us can be wholly self-sufficient, or live in isolation. Neither can we afford to neglect opportunities to widen our understanding of the environment in which we live, or to make known our interests to those who share that environment with us. We must continually develop our capacity in self-reliance against the background that the formal protection by other powers which was previously part of our colonial experience, is no longer wholly valid. For these reasons I welcome you to this meeting.

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There are many practical issues and questions of immediate concern on the agenda, and we look forwardto the opportunity to learn about your problems and the solutions which you favour. In fact and substance this is a meeting where we are all equal and where the importance of regional co-operation is uppermost in our minds.

Our first meeting in Wellington was a natural success. It showed that despite our diverse histories, we had problems in common and the will to solve them. I am confident that this meeting will be as successful and my Government will spare no effort to make it so. It is my hope that from this meeting will develop a stronger friendship to reinforce our sense of regional identity and common purpose, harnessed to the welfare and prosperity of all the peoples of the South Pacific.

We are glad so many of you have found it possible, in spite of your many and urgent responsibilities, to spare the time to see at first hand a little of our country and our Australian community which shares to the full in the welcome I give you today.

I declare the Forum open.

CANBERRA
23 February 1972