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PRIME MINISTER

CIVIC RECEPTION

SPRINGVALE TOWN HALL, MELBOURNE, VIC.

19 May 1972

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon.
William McMahon, CH, MP.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you Councillor Marriott (Mayor), Mrs Marriott and all Councillors.

There are two facts about your municipality that have attracted my attention. Yours is a growth area which can match any other part of Victoria and probably any other part of Australia. You are truly a part of the suburban explosion that is going on around the edges of Australia's great cities. The second is that Springvale is a young area. Where there were farms a few years ago, you now have over 60,000 people in Springvale municipality alone. Many of them are young couples with their young families. Many of them are new settlers taking advantage of the very large migrant hostel in this area.

These two features - growth and youth - pose special problems to be solved and special needs to be met by government at all levels whether it be here with you at the local government level and I believe it is fundamental to preserve and co-operate with local government, or whether it be at the State Government level, or whether it be a problem that may be placed in my "In Tray" in the Federal Government in Canberra.

When I mention the importance we attach to local government in the Australian system, I am not just being complimentary. Only last month, the Cabinet decided as a matter of principle that local government ought to be involved in "the convention" which has been proposed to review the Australian constitution. That demonstrates our serious intent when we speak about the role of local government.

These special needs and problems I have mentioned involve all three levels of government. And inevitably there will be areas where they overlap. But it should be remembered that these are problems of growth which occur against the background of a developing, diversifying and expanding national economy. These are problems which will not be swept away by words and promises. They will be overcome only by patient and intelligent co-operation between the three-tiers of our Australian system of government. There are some people in public life who find it fashionable these days to say that we have a "crisis" in our cities, and that our problems are similar to those of comparable cities overseas. Such claims are, of course, wildly inaccurate. Nevertheless, we in the Federal Government think there is a good reason for concern that action should be taken now to improve current living conditions, and to avoid greater problems in the future.

No one would try to pretend that the cities do not have their problems: such matters as high land costs, atmospheric pollution, traffic congestion, long distance commuting, recreational congestion, lack of community centres in outer suburbs and the increased crime rate, violence and other similar problems. These matters are basically the direct responsibility of the two tiers of our government structure closest to the people, that is, the state and local governments. The Commonwealth Government sees as one of its first duties the management of the national economy. On that score I think I can claim here and now that our very flexible and responsive stance, and our willingness to act boldly and decide positively in stimulating the economy, is now paying off in the return of business confidence and the continuing improvement in employment.

Secondly, we have, within this area of national economic policy, continually increased and improved our allocations to state and local governments. Before people become carried away with labels like "urbanisation" or "urban affairs" or the "challenge of the cities", they should stop for a moment to consider the billions for schools, for housing, for roads, for sewerage, for hospitals that has come out of the many years of practical co-operation between Commonwealth and State Governments under a Liberal Country Party Government.

Thirdly, there are the ways in which we are giving direct assistance. Health and education are two areas where we have just made further improvements.

But, Mr Mayor, I don't want to speak for too long as I want to meet personally as many of those who are here today. But I did want to tell you that we in Canberra and we in the Liberal Party see these matters in a sympathetic way, and how we are prepared to help co-operatively and constructively and without imposing long distance bureaucracy from local problems.

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