



# PRIME MINISTER

## OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE DARWIN RIVER DAM

DARWIN, N.T.

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

29 June, 1972.

May I apologise to you for the delay in getting here this afternoon. I am not any good at arithmetic, but I am told that we had a headwind of between 100 and 220 miles per hour, and that delayed us for an hour.

I hope your remarks about your own Premier turn out to be wrong. I hope you have your new Leader and your new Statehood, not at the time you get your next dam, but at the time you get your next power station.

This is my first visit to the Territory since I became Prime Minister and I am looking forward to it even though it might only be a few days. Because it is a many purposed visit to see the mining developments at Gove, to visit Darwin again after a long absence, to have talks with the aborigines at the Yirrkala Mission, and to open the new Aboriginal Transitional College in Arnhem Land.

First, may I talk to you about the Territory and its future. I and my Government have faith in Australia and in the future of the north. This dam Mr. Reiker has said - to cost \$9 million and the largest ever build in the Territory - is unmistakable proof of that faith.

But let me put this project in the context of the total volume of new public works being provided by the Commonwealth.

Since 1967, Commonwealth capital expenditure of nearly two hundred million dollars has been approved, and total Commonwealth capital and maintenance expenditure has been almost 630 million dollars. A lot of money, money well spent - because it is providing the basic infra-structure for development and for progress.

Let us take mining first. The big ventures at Gove, Groote Eylandt and Tennant Creek have involved new investment of almost 400 million dollars. The copper and gold mines at Tennant Creek and the manganese mine at Groote Eylandt are already major income earners for us.

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Production of bauxite at the 300 million dollar Gove project commenced in 1971. By mid-1973 the project will be producing 1.4 million tons of bauxite and one million tons of alumina a year. This will include 60 million dollars of export income.

These, and other mining projects, have attracted large-scale private capital, modern technology - and people. Private initiative has been encouraged, and services have been provided by the Commonwealth Government, in order to get these projects off the ground. But it is fair to say the development has only been made possible by the faith and enterprise and large-scale investment of the companies involved.

Then there is the investment in the pastoral industry, in tourism and in prawning.

More than a decade ago, we took the initiative to construct beef roads. To date, more than thirty million dollars has been approved in expenditure on these roads. This has given a significant lift to the pastoral industry and to overall national and local development. Today 96 per cent of the cattle turned off are transported by road, and the value of the turnoff has doubled to more than 22 million dollars a year.

I am sure the tourist industry has uncalculable but enormous potential. In fact tourists are now spending more than \$20 million a year here.

The prawning industry, which has developed over the last three years, is supplying about a third of the nation's prawn exports.

This remarkable growth in the basic industries has led to a rapid increase in population, as Mr. Reiher said, at a rate of about nine per cent a year.

Darwin and Alice Springs are attractive in themselves and have become the fastest growing towns in Australia. They've nearly doubled their population over the past six years, and can no longer be regarded as frontier towns.

During the last five years, the Commonwealth has matched this outstanding growth by programming new works in the main Territory centres valued at very nearly 100 million dollars. This means a big improvement in the quality of life for the people who live here, and who want to come here in the future.

The government is also deeply concerned in case there should be any possible conflict between the full development of the nation's mineral wealth and the need to preserve the nation's environment. In the reconciliation of these conflicting interests, we have adopted a realistic and I believe, a practical approach. Our paramount concern is Australia's national interest, and the welfare - in its widest sense - of our own people.

The government would be irresponsible if it failed to develop the recently discovered uranium deposits, but we are not interested in development for development's sake.

We are concerned about conservation of the natural environment and the preservation for posterity of unique features of the ecology. The study which we have initiated on various aspects of the environment in areas of potential uranium development in the Alligator River region, is an example of our policy in action.

This study, jointly financed by the government and the mining companies, is estimated to cost more than 500 thousand dollars. It will identify and evaluate the flora and fauna and other natural resources of the area, so that the mining development can proceed in a way consistent with the preservation of a unique and irreplaceable part of our country.

The government's aim is consistent with the description by the Secretary of the Interior in the United States:

"A proper balance between resource development and the maintenance of pleasant surroundings".

We want to see development that will make a permanent contribution to the Australian economy in a way which will preserve the inherited values of our own environment, and which will retain for all Australians the features of that environment which should be preserved and enjoyed.

This dam is a credit to all who have worked on it, and who have completed it ahead of schedule. It brings to over 15 million dollars the total expenditure approved by the Commonwealth on new water supply projects in the Territory over the last five years.

Congratulations to the Northern Territory administration, responsible for the water supply; to the Department of Works - the design and construction authority; to the main contractors, McMahon Construction Pty. Ltd. of Adelaide....I can't claim any reflected glory - and to the other contractors and organizations involved here today.

I now have the very greatest pleasure in declaring the Darwin River Dam open.

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