



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT HON.

WILLIAM McMAHON, CH, MP, IN THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES, CANBERRA.

POWERS OVER AND PROTECTION OFFERED TO WITNESSES BEFORE
PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

26 OCTOBER, 1972

Mr Speaker:

The paper I have just tabled has been prepared by the two chief law officers of the Crown, the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General. It is entitled "Powers over and protection offered to witnesses before Parliamentary Committees".

In May 1971, at a time of great public interest in the subject, I requested the Attorney-General to prepare a paper of the parliamentary committee system which would give particular attention to the constitutional position and the provision of guidelines for the protection of witnesses.

The comprehensive paper I have just tabled was prepared by the Attorney in collaboration with the Solicitor-General. Its purpose is to discuss the power of inquiry of committees appointed by Houses of the Parliament, and the rights and duties of witnesses appearing before those committees. The paper also considers whether there are any additional steps which might be taken to safeguard the interests of witnesses and of persons named in evidence before the committees.

The Government has not yet had an opportunity to consider the position as disclosed by the paper or the suggestions made for possible changes.

However, in view of the great importance of the subject, the Government has decided that the paper should now be tabled, so that it can be studied by Members of the Parliament and the public.

As I conclude, Mr Speaker, I want to express to the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General my appreciation, which I am sure will be shared by all who read the paper, of the comprehensiveness of the paper and of the very considerable amount of time, effort, skill and learning which has gone into its preparation.