



PRESS STATEMENT NO. 43

24 January 1973

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA, MR. WHITLAM, AND THE CHIEF MINISTER OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA, MR. SOMARE

PAPUA NEW GUINEA FISHING RIGHTS - GULF OF CARPENTARIA

The Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, and the Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea, Mr. Somare, today issued the following statement concerning their discussions in Canberra on 17 January 1973.

The Chief Minister had raised with Ministers of the previous Australian Government the question of the rights of the Papua New Guinea Government to legislate on its own behalf on fisheries matters. He had also discussed arrangements for the management of the fisheries resources in the waters between Australia and Papua New Guinea. On that occasion Ministers had agreed that both countries must benefit from joint management arrangements and mutual co-operation in the exploitation and conservation of the fisheries resources of the seas which lay between them.

At that time Ministers also agreed to the following arrangements:

- .. delegation of licensing powers to the P.N.G. Government subject to agreement on interim arrangements to apply after the delegation of licensing powers and until the transfer of complete powers;
- .. work to be commenced on the preparation of separate fisheries legislation for Papua New Guinea. Review of the amendments currently proposed to the Commonwealth Fisheries Act with a view to exclusion of Papua New Guinea from the provisions of the Act;
- .. conclusion of interim arrangements to be set down in an exchange of letters between the two governments.

The Papua New Guinea Government had then asked that the interim arrangements include the following provisions:

- (a) Papua New Guinea to license an appropriate number of prawn catcher and carrier vessels to fish in all proclaimed waters outside the Declared Fisheries Zone; and
- (b) agreement by all Papua New Guinea vessels licensed under (a) above to comply with Australian conservation and management measures as applied to other Australian vessels licensed under the Commonwealth Fisheries Act.

Following those discussions the Chief Minister had now raised with the Prime Minister the question of rights of access for Papua New Guinea fishing vessels into the Gulf of Carpentaria, and claimed that under present administrative arrangements Papua New Guinea vessels were being denied access to international waters because the restrictive provisions of the Commonwealth Fisheries Act continued to be applied against the interests of Papua New Guinea.

The Prime Minister has agreed that there appeared to be an anomaly in the situation, and that Australia had a trusteeship responsibility to promote the economic viability of Papua New Guinea by providing reasonable assistance to Papua New Guinea industries, and saw grounds for a change of Australian policy to allow additional access to the Gulf of Carpentaria for an agreed number of Papua New Guinea fishing vessels. The Chief Minister suggested that Papua New Guinea be granted the right to license twelve Papua New Guinea vessels to operate in the Gulf of Carpentaria from the commencement of the 1973 prawning season. The Prime Minister agreed that that would be an appropriate number, and arrangements are being made to put this decision into effect.

The Prime Minister and the Chief Minister agreed that Papua New Guinea fishing vessels operating in the Gulf of Carpentaria would remain in international waters outside the Australian Declared Fishing Zone (12 miles offshore) and would observe conservation and management measures as applied to other vessels licensed under the Australian Fisheries Act.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.