

ALBURY-WODONGA

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. E.G. WHITLAM, ALBURY CIVIC CENTRE, 25
JANUARY 1973

This is an historic meeting. It is the first time on which the Governments of the two oldest and most important States have come together with the Commonwealth to plan the development of a new city. I trust it will signal the beginning, not only of similar regional development projects, but of a new spirit of common enterprise within our Federation. The Murray River, once the symbol of colonial separation and interstate rivalries, may yet come to stand for a new era of interstate co-operation.

All three Governments represented here are committed to decentralisation. New South Wales and Victoria have worked towards this goal over many years. But my Government believes that only with the active participation of the Commonwealth, in a scheme involving all three Governments as well as the local authorities, can real decentralisation be achieved.

This enterprise is therefore a challenge to our energy, our ability to work together, and our determination to ensure the success of a pilot project which may one day convert our former dreams and theories into living and concrete reality. On the outcome of this task, the whole future of decentralisation in this country may stand or fall.

My Government is committed to the concept of building new cities. In my policy speech last November, I announced that at first we would concentrate our initiatives and endeavours in the Albury-Wodonga area. In making this choice, we were conscious that as a national Government our involvement would benefit two States, and ease the pressure on our two largest cities - Sydney and Melbourne.

As I have mentioned, we regard this project as only the first of several new cities with the development of which we will be involved. We are determined, therefore, to use our full resources to ensure its success. We believe that the chances of success are high. Its location on the transport corridor between Melbourne and Sydney will be attractive to industry. It has an adequate supply of water. It is convenient to major recreational areas, and its natural environment provides a beautiful setting.

Let me outline briefly what the Commonwealth hopes to see happen at Albury-Wodonga. We look first of all, for a significant acceleration of population growth. Much of this increased population would, we hope, be made up of people who would otherwise have gone to Sydney or Melbourne. We want to see Albury-Wodonga achieve the status of a major city. We set no limit to its growth, but believe that if the new city is to achieve its major purpose it should have at least 300,000 people. And this growth will be planned

to ensure a quality of life at the highest level: Pollution will be controlled: The environment protected.

The economic benefits of this development must pass to the people of Australia. Large sums of public money must be spent. We believe that this can give a good return but we must ensure that the return is to the community at large and is not tapped off to provide an unearned gain to land speculators. We want land to be cheap and its use to be controlled in such a way that the new city is both beautiful and efficient. We also want home ownership in the new city to be less of a burden to families than it has become in the major Australian cities. To this end the Commonwealth believes that the leasehold system must prevail.

From the beginning of this major project, we want local people to be involved in its planning and operation. We hope that the machinery which is devised to develop and operate this new city will, in at least some respects, become a model for future local and regional Government.

The Australian Government has available - in the National Capital Development Commission and the National Urban and Regional Development authority - the fund of technical expertise which has conceived, planned and built in Canberra, the only substantial new Australian city of our time. For historical and constitutional reasons we have had a particular connection with the Murray River. The Commonwealth will be associated with supplying the quantity of water required by the new city through the Snowy Mountains Authority and the River Murray Commission.

Let me outline now the steps my Government has already taken to ensure the success of this venture.

The Postmaster-General's Department has been instructed to prepare a report on the cost of recognising Albury-Wodonga as an extension of the Metropolitan area of both Sydney and Melbourne, for the purpose of keeping telephone and telex charges at a suitable level for industry.

The Australian Universities Commission and the Australian Council of Advanced Education have, as I have already indicated in my letters to Sir Robert Askin and Mr. Hamer on the 15th of December, been instructed to confer and report on the provision of tertiary education facilities in this area.

In accordance with the recommendations of Sir Henry Bland on the Victorian Land Transport System, the Bureau of Transport Economics has been instructed to investigate the impact of inter-system rating practices on rail traffic from the Riverina.

All Departments in the Federal Government have been asked to investigate the possibility of locating divisions of the Public Service in Albury-Wodonga.

The new Department of Tourism and Recreation has been instructed to investigate tourist development in Albury-Wodonga and to recommend a program for increasing it.

Finally, as you are aware, my Government is committed to amending the Commonwealth Grants Commission Act to give local authorities access to the Commission. We propose to encourage all relevant local authorities in the Albury-Wodonga area to consult and co-operate in preparing such a submission on a regional basis. The new Department of Urban Affairs and Regional Development will make its expert advisers available to any co-operative effort among the local authorities.

I do not wish to anticipate the detailed decisions that will flow from this meeting, but I trust we will reach common agreement on our objectives, and set in motion a feasibility study of the project. I hope we will reach agreement upon the general structure and essential powers of the tripartite development authority, on the structure of consultation and supervision at Ministerial level, and the procedure for involvement of local authorities.

I am grateful to the Governments of New South Wales and Victoria for their generous co-operation in this scheme and for the valuable work they have already done to ensure its success. Let us bend all our efforts to work in harmony together and achieve our aims. None of us here is indifferent to the present sprawling growth of our major cities, with all the waste, the pollution, the inefficiency they bring, and the baneful effect of their unchecked growth on the living standards of our people. Here is a chance, in the most literal sense, to build for tomorrow and improve the lives not only of the people of this region, but of other cities, today and in times to come.