



**DEPARTMENT OF
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AFFAIRS**

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PRIME MINISTER TO ATTEND SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM

The Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr E.G. Whitlam, said today that he was greatly looking forward to attending the Fourth meeting of the South Pacific Forum, to be held in Apia, Western Samoa from 17 to 19 April, 1973.

He and Mrs Whitlam will fly from Sydney on Tuesday (17 April) and arrive in Apia the same day.

Mr Whitlam said that meetings of the Forum provided an invaluable opportunity for the Heads of Government of the independent and self-governing countries in the South Pacific region to exchange views on matters of mutual concern at first-hand and to get to know each other better.

In addition to the regular Forum members (Australia, Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Tonga and Western Samoa) the Apia meeting would be attended for the first time by Papua New Guinea and Niue.

Mr Whitlam said that matters to be considered at the meeting would include French nuclear tests, relations with the

European Economic Community, regional shipping, and the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation.

"Long before my Government assumed office the Australian Labor Party had carefully considered Australia's relations with the Island States and Territories of the South Pacific region," Mr Whitlam said.

"It is the wish of the Government that Australia should deepen its cooperation with its Pacific neighbours and, where suitable opportunities present themselves, to initiate positive proposals for increased cooperation."

Mr Whitlam said that Australia would be presenting to the South Pacific Forum at Apia some new ideas to enhance cooperation within the South Pacific region.

He regretted he would be unable to remain in Apia for the full period of the meeting owing to his commitments in London, but he was very pleased that Senator the Hon. Don Willesee, the Special Minister of State and Minister Assisting the Minister for Foreign Affairs, would be with him in Apia and would take his place on the last day of the meeting.

Mr Whitlam said both he and Senator Willesee would be accompanied by their wives. The Prime Minister's party will also include Miss Cathy Whitlam and a team of senior advisers from the Departments of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Overseas Trade.

After Apia, the Prime Minister and his party will proceed to London, and then return to Australia via Rome and Mauritius, arriving in Canberra on 30 April.