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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
AT THE ALBURY TRADE FAIR - SATURDAY 21 JULY, 1973

I am glad of the opportunity to visit the Albury Trade Fair (this year entitled "New Cities Expo '73") and speak to you tonight. The scope and quality of the Fair - and certainly its title - are an encouraging symbol of what we hope to achieve in this, our first growth centre.

I first spoke at Albury more than three years ago. At the opening of the 38th Annual Conference of Rotary International I suggested that Albury/Wodonga would be a perfect place for a new city. When we were elected we wasted no time in setting about to fulfil that promise. It is just six months since I met with the Premier of Victoria, Mr. Hamer, and the Premier of New South Wales, Sir Robert Askin, here, and we agreed on the proposal to create a new Australian city.

There is, of course, no such thing as an "instant" city. In sensitive planning areas pat solutions must be suspect. However, although some of you may feel that there has been little tangible evidence of the new project, if you examine what has been done over this time, you will realise that we have built a very sound base on which the area will grow.

My colleague, the Australian Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Tom Uren, outlined our achievements to you on Thursday night. One of the most satisfying of these is the way in which the three governments have worked in such harmony on the project. He also explained the organisation which will be set up to undertake the planning and development of the growth complex. I hope that this will have answered any questions or doubts you will have had on this subject.

The Ministerial Council made up of Mr. Uren, the New South Wales Minister for Decentralisation and Development, Mr. Fuller, and the Victorian Minister for State Development and Decentralisation and Development, Mr. Byrne, has agreed that the development organisation will be established before the end of this year. I support this timetable and the Australian Government will do everything within its power to see that enabling legislation is passed in the forthcoming session of the Australian Parliament.

The Australian Government believes that the last election was won largely because of the appalling lack of foresight which has led to the congestion and strangling snarl of unplanned growth in our cities. By the creation of Albury/Wodonga; by the development of other new cities and growth area, by concentrating on alleviating the problems of people in the worst hit western areas of Sydney and Melbourne; by the creation of land commissions and by making federal money more immediately available to local government, we believe we will be able to bring order back into the lives of urban dwelling Australians.

The Australian Government cannot do the job on its own, particularly in view of constitutional limitations on its power. To carry out projects such as Albury/Wodonga the Australian Government has to work in close co-operation with the States and local instrumentalities.

The new Department of Urban and Regional Development will have the responsibility for developing and implementing a national urban and regional development strategy as a major policy area of the Australian Government. It will also have the responsibility for negotiating with, advising and helping state and local governments in the preparation and implementation of urban and regional plans.

With the chief co-ordination and policy-making role in the area of urban and regional development lying with the Department, it will be the Cities Commission which will be chiefly responsible for the physical development of Albury/Wodonga. The Commission is also under the control of the Minister for Urban and Regional Development and is linked to the Department.

One of the main ways in which the Australian Government will be helping the States in the development of Albury/Wodonga is with money. It will finance land acquisition and land development by interest-bearing advances - although in the long term I believe that this growth complex will be self-supporting.

At present we cannot expect New South Wales and Victoria to switch resources quickly to Albury/Wodonga in fields like education and health while there are backlogs elsewhere in the States. Certain existing municipal services will need to be supplemented and in this respect special federal grants or long-term loans will be made available in the early years. Nevertheless in keeping with the tripartite nature of the enterprise, the Victorian and New South Wales Governments will be providing services to keep pace with the accelerated growth of Albury/Wodonga beyond this initial phase.

The development of Albury/Wodonga has been accorded high priority by the Australian Government this year and this will be reflected in the forthcoming budget.

We realise, of course, that in the development of any new area there are a multitude of problems to be overcome. With planning and co-operation between the Australian Government, the Governments of the two States of Victoria and New South Wales and local government in the regions, we are confident we will overcome them.

One of the problems which has been aired frequently in the press and by people in the area is the problem of the rising price of land. To deal with one aspect of this, the Premiers of Victoria and New South Wales and I agreed after a meeting at Albury/Wodonga on 25 January that the price of land to be acquired for the purposes of the project would be based at the market level of prices prevailing at 3 October last year. This means that the land which the Governments will acquire is stabilised - not frozen - at that price. Any necessary adjustments will be made for general land price changes during the period up to the date of purchase, caused by factors apart from the announcement of the development

of the area. In this way we have ensured that no profit is made merely because the area is to be developed, but that those whose land is to be acquired will not suffer because of this. Legislation to implement this decision was introduced into the Victorian Parliament in June and will be debated in the Upper House in the spring session of Parliament. New South Wales expects to introduce complementary legislation within the same session.

Officers from the Cities Commission have recently been investigating the whole land question in Albury/Wodonga. They have been looking into land availability, the extent to which land is changing hands in Albury/Wodonga and the pressures on existing land, housing and social infrastructure. We must find out what the facts are before we can contemplate what action is to be taken.

Today no-one debunks the idea of decentralisation. However, some people are still dubious about the idea of the development of inland cities. Australians, they say, want to live on the coast, and they point to the growth in the coastal cities. It has always been beyond me how people who have to travel for two hours through weekend traffic to get to the crowded city beaches can claim to be living on the coast. Whatever relaxation and regeneration they can claim from this trip to the sea must be dissipated in the tedious crawl through the traffic to get there and back. Many Australians living in large "coastal" cities cannot truly be said to be living by the sea. It takes them as long to reach the sea as it takes the citizens of that first successful Australian inland growth centre - Canberra. We expect with the development of Albury/Wodonga to dissipate this great coastal cringe and return to something of the feeling of the early settlers who set off to populate the inland of this vast tract of earth they had come to occupy.

Much has been said of the advantages of choosing Albury/Wodonga for our first designated growth centre; its positions on a major inter-capital link; its present state of development; its happy incorporation of two States. But I feel that few people yet realise the advantages to its present and future residents in terms of what is offering in the surrounding inland countryside. At the risk of sounding like a tourist guide I suggest that those who might flinch at the thought of leaving the recreational facilities of their "coastal" cities might consider the enormous scope for activities like fishing, climbing, walking, ski-ing, canoe-ing and sailing offered by Albury/Wodonga's proximity to some splendid mountains, rivers and Lake Hume. For those with an interest in Australian history nearby towns like Beechworth in Victoria have preserved and still have in use an almost overwhelming number of buildings classified by the National Trust. Now that the Government has established a committee of inquiry into the national estate chaired by Mr. Justice Hope we would hope that the respect for history prevailing in such towns will be given an opportunity to prevail through the rest of Australia. And for those who like their pleasures somewhat more full-bodied there are of course the vineyards of the Rutherglen and Glenrowan areas.

It is this accessibility to a variety of activities which makes Albury/Wodonga a satisfying place, in addition to the simple advantage of living in a smaller and well-planned community. Compare this with the isolation from most of the benefits of the city suffered by people living in the sprawling outer suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne - suburbs which are increasingly the only ones available to young couples who want to buy their own homes.

We spoke of quality of life in the last national elections. We believe that the creation of Albury/Wodonga, along with other growth centres, will prove a step which will vastly improve the quality of life of thousands of Australians over the next few decades.
