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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
MR. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
TO OPEN THE AUSTRALIAN HOUSING STANDARDS CONFERENCE,
LAKESIDE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, CANBERRA,
MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER, 1973

THOSE ACQUAINTED WITH MY PERSONAL FOIBLES WILL KNOW HOW CLOSE TO MY HEART THE SUBJECT OF YOUR CONFERENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN. IN THE MORE MUNDANE MATTERS OF STATESMANSHIP THERE WERE TWO PARTICULAR HOBBY-HORSES THAT I RODE WITH GREAT ENERGY DURING MY YEARS IN OPPOSITION. ONE WAS SEWERAGE; THE OTHER WAS UNIFORM HOUSING STANDARDS. I REGRET TO SAY THAT MANY PEOPLE MADE LIGHT OF THESE MATTERS. YET BOTH OF THEM WERE CRUCIAL, IN THEIR DIFFERENT WAYS, TO THE BASIC LIVING STANDARDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE. THE BUILDING INDUSTRY IS STILL HAMPERED BY A BEWILDERING VARIETY OF LEGAL CODES AND STANDARDS. I AM THEREFORE DELIGHTED THAT YOU HAVE ASKED ME TO OPEN THIS IMPORTANT CONFERENCE. I TRUST THAT, IN A SINGULAR AND PERHAPS UNSPECTACULAR WAY, IT WILL PROVE TO BE ONE OF THE MOST FRUITFUL AND REWARDING INITIATIVES MY GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN.

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS NOT ALONE IN ITS PERCEPTION OF THE FOLLIES AND DANGERS OF CONFLICTING STANDARDS AND OUTMODED PRACTICES IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND ALL AREAS OF THE BUILDING INDUSTRY. THE STATES HAVE COME GRADUALLY TO RECOGNISE THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS. THE STERLING WORK THAT HAS RESULTED IN THE AUSTRALIAN MODEL UNIFORM BUILDING CODE IS PROOF OF THIS, AND I HOPE THAT CODE WILL SOON BE ADOPTED BY ALL STATES. A FURTHER PROOF IS THE PRESENCE HERE TODAY OF THE MOST REPRESENTATIVE GROUP OF PEOPLE IN THE HOUSING INDUSTRY EVER GATHERED IN AUSTRALIA - BUILDERS, ARCHITECTS, PLANNERS, MATERIALS SUPPLIERS, UNIONISTS, ADMINISTRATORS, ENGINEERS, SURVEYORS, CONTRACTORS, INSTITUTIONAL LENDERS AND BUILDING CONTROLLERS. YOUR COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF THE HOME BUILDING INDUSTRY IS UNRIVALLED.

THERE HAVE BEEN HOUSING SEMINARS AND FORUMS BEFORE, BUT THIS CONFERENCE IS UNIQUE. YOU ARE NOT HERE SIMPLY TO EXCHANGE VIEWS AND INFORMATION. YOU HAVE A VERY PRACTICAL TASK BEFORE YOU. I HOPE THIS CONFERENCE WILL SUPERVISE THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW STANDARDS FOR HOUSING BASED ON ORIGINAL RESEARCH; THAT IT WILL DEVELOP MODERN, READILY UNDERSTOOD NATIONAL HOME BUILDING REGULATIONS WHICH CAN BE APPLIED AND ADMINISTERED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES. THAT IS YOUR CHALLENGE.

I AM HEARTENED BY THE PRESENCE HERE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE TIERS OF GOVERNMENT, BECAUSE IT IS THE HOUSING DEPARTMENTS IN THE STATES AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES WHOSE FULL CO-OPERATION IS NEEDED. WE MUST ENSURE THAT ANY NEW HOME BUILDING CODE IS A NATIONAL ONE, A UNIVERSAL ONE, SO THAT INDUSTRY CAN OPERATE WITH THE GREATEST EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY, AND ORDINARY HOME BUYERS CAN BENEFIT FROM REDUCTIONS IN COST.

I HAVE REFERRED MANY TIMES TO THE NEED TO REDUCE HOME BUILDING COSTS, BUT THE UNPALATABLE FACT IS THAT LATELY WE HAVE SEEN INORDINATE INCREASES RATHER THAN REDUCTIONS. PERHAPS THAT IS DUE TO OUR HIGH STANDARD OF LIVING AND ADVANCING EXPECTATIONS. WE ARE NEVER LIKELY TO SEE CHEAP LABOUR AND CUT-THROAT COMPETITION AGAIN. WITH THE ADVENT OF RELATIVELY FULL, AND I HOPE STABLE, EMPLOYMENT, AND THE ADVANCE OF EDUCATION, THERE WILL BE A PROGRESSIVELY DECLINING SUPPLY OF ON-SITE LABOUR, OF SEMI-SKILLED MEN FOR BRICKYARDS AND TIMBER MILLS. WE MUST EXPECT A MORE MECHANIZED ERA IN BUILDING - LESS ON-SITE WORK AND MORE FACTORY WORK - IN WHICH GREATER UNIFORMITY AND RATIONALISATION OF PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES WILL HELP REDUCE COSTS. I AM TOLD THAT EVERY ONE PER CENT SAVING OF COSTS IN THE BUILDING INDUSTRY IS WORTH AT LEAST \$20 MILLION A YEAR.

I DO NOT HAVE TO TELL BUILDERS AND SUPPLIERS HOW DIFFERING REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS ADD SIGNIFICANTLY TO THEIR COSTS. THEY KNOW THIS. IT IS A SUBJECT THAT YOUR CONFERENCE WILL EXPLORE. IT IS SUFFICIENT FOR ME TO EMPHASISE THAT SUBSTANTIAL ECONOMIES IN HOME BUILDING CAN BE ACHIEVED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AT OUR COMMAND. THE BENEFITS WILL BE FELT IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE, AND NOT LEAST FOR THOSE WITH PARTICULAR NEEDS - THE ELDERLY, THE DISABLED, ABORIGINES, AND PEOPLE LIVING IN AREAS OF CLIMATIC EXTREMES.

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTS THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS CONFERENCE. WE HAVE TAKEN THE INITIATIVE BY ESTABLISHING AN EXPERT TECHNICAL TASK FORCE. THIS TASK FORCE WILL INCLUDE ARCHITECTS, ENGINEERS, QUANTITY SURVEYORS AND SOCIOLOGISTS, SUPPORTED BY TECHNICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS OF THE NEW COMBINED DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE TASK FORCE WILL BE TO PREPARE A NUMBER OF GENERALLY ACCEPTABLE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR HOME BUILDING IN AUSTRALIA, EXPRESSED AS CLEARLY AND SIMPLY AS POSSIBLE. LET ME EMPHASISE THAT UNIFORM HOUSING STANDARDS NEED NOT MEAN UNIFORMITY IN STYLES. EACH AUSTRALIAN CITY HAS A DISTINCTIVE ARCHITECTURE, AND IT IS CENTRAL TO OUR PLANS FOR NEW AUSTRALIAN CITIES THAT AUSTRALIANS SHOULD HAVE AN AUTHENTIC CHOICE OF LOCATIONS AND STYLES.

THE FORMULATION OF SUCH NATIONAL STANDARDS WILL INVOLVE CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH THE STATES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS DIRECTLY CONCERNED. WE ARE LOOKING FOR CONSENSUS: WE ARE NOT SEEKING TO ACCEPT A LOWEST AGREED DENOMINATOR. WHERE NECESSARY, THE EXPERTS WILL UNDERTAKE FRESH RESEARCH SO THAT DECISIONS CAN BE BASED ON SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS.

THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS THAT THE TASK FORCE WILL PREPARE A SERIES OF SUPPLEMENTARY PUBLICATIONS AFTER STUDYING CLIMATIC DIFFERENCES, DESIGN AND SITING, SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND FITMENTS WITHIN DWELLINGS. THIS CONFERENCE AND ITS EXPERT COMMITTEES WILL PROVIDE THE GUIDELINES THAT THE TASK FORCE WILL FOLLOW. AT THE SAME TIME THE HOUSING INDUSTRY WILL BE ABLE TO REVISE ITS THINKING IN OTHER DIRECTIONS, ESPECIALLY IN ADOPTING NEW METRIC SIZES. AND REMEMBER ALWAYS THAT HOUSING STANDARDS ARE NOT NEEDED MERELY TO ENSURE THAT ONE COMPONENT FITS ANOTHER, BUT THAT MINIMUM STANDARDS AND QUALITIES PREVAIL.

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS AN IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY IN BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HOUSING. WE HAVE DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOVERNMENT HOUSING IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY. IF, HOWEVER, WE CAN REDUCE THE COST OF HOUSING IN THE STATES BY RESEARCH, BY DEVELOPMENT AND BY UNIFYING HOME BUILDING REGULATIONS, THE TAXPAYER'S HOUSING DOLLAR CAN BE MADE TO GO FURTHER IN EACH STATE'S WELFARE HOUSING PROGRAMS.

TO TAKE ONE PRACTICAL EXAMPLE, THERE IS CLEARLY A NEED FOR UNIFORM HOUSING STANDARDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALBURY-WODONGA. IMAGINE THE DIFFICULTIES CREATED AND HIGH COSTS INCURRED IF THE DIFFERENCES IN REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS WHICH NOW EXIST ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE MURRAY ARE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE. THIS IS TRUE FOR OTHER POPULATION CENTRES NEAR STATE BORDERS. WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT A COMPANY PRODUCING COMPONENTS OR FITTINGS IN TOOWOOMBA CAN HAVE A NATION-WIDE MARKET AND SELL ITS PRODUCTS IN PERTH AND LAUNCESTON.

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE SUCH AS THIS CAN TAKE INITIATIVES TO SECURE ^{THESE REFORMS} THIS. WITH CO-OPERATIVE EFFORT AMONG PEOPLE OF MANY DISCIPLINES, GREAT ABILITIES AND MUCH EXPERIENCE, I AM SURE THIS CONFERENCE CAN MAKE REAL PROGRESS IN OVERCOMING THE URGENT PROBLEMS FACING THE HOME BUILDING INDUSTRY. I WISH YOU SUCCESS. IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO DECLARE THIS INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE AUSTRALIAN HOUSING STANDARDS CONFERENCE OPEN.
