

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
MR. E. G. WHITLAM, Q.C. M.P.,
TO OPEN THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF
THE NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL,
CANBERRA, MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER 1973

THIS MEETING HAS ASSEMBLED TO GIVE PRACTICAL EXPRESSION TO OUR HOPES - WHATEVER GOVERNMENT WE REPRESENT, WHATEVER PARTY WE REPRESENT - THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN REGIONS OF AUSTRALIA WILL GO FORWARD WITH SPEED, WITH CERTAINTY, AND WITH GREAT BENEFITS FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTH AND ALL AUSTRALIANS.

THIS IS BY NO MEANS THE FIRST MEETING THIS YEAR BETWEEN THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND CERTAIN STATE GOVERNMENTS TO EXAMINE ISSUES OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO PARTICULAR REGIONS. THERE HAVE BEEN TALKS BETWEEN THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE VICTORIAN AND NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENTS CONCERNING ALBURY-WODONGA, AND WITH THE VICTORIAN, NEW SOUTH WALES AND SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS CONCERNING THE MURRAY WATERS AGREEMENT. THOSE MEETINGS REACHED HIGHLY SATISFACTORY CONCLUSIONS. I HAVE HIGH HOPES THAT THIS MEETING WILL DO LIKEWISE.

IT MAY BE THAT SMALLER CONFERENCES SUCH AS THIS -
MORE INTIMATE, MORE MANAGEABLE, MORE PURPOSEFUL
PERHAPS - CAN PRODUCE QUICKER AND MORE SATISFACTORY
RESULTS THAN FULL-SCALE PREMIERS' CONFERENCES. IN
ANY CASE, I WELCOME MR. BJELKE-PETERSEN AND
MR. BICKERTON. I AM GRATEFUL FOR THEIR ATTENDANCE
AT THIS INAUGURAL MEETING. I VENTURE TO SUGGEST THAT
THEY MAY DERIVE SOME REASSURANCE FROM THE FACT THAT
AT ANY MEETING HELD HERE, IN THIS SENATE ~~CHAMBER OF~~ ^{committee room}
~~THE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT~~, THE RIGHTS AND INTERESTS OF
THE STATES WILL BE AMPLY PROTECTED.

FOR AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE PAST,
NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SOMEWHAT REMOTE
AND PERIPHERAL CONCERN. FOR A GOVERNMENT IN CANBERRA,
"THE NORTH" MEANT ONLY A FRACTION OF THE AREA OVER
WHICH ITS RESPONSIBILITY RAN; FOR A GOVERNMENT IN
PERTH IT MEANT PERHAPS HALF ITS AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY;
FOR A GOVERNMENT IN BRISBANE OR AN ADMINISTRATION IN
DARWIN, IT MEANT NEARLY ALL OF IT. SO I AM CONSCIOUS
OF THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENTS OF QUEENSLAND AND
WESTERN AUSTRALIA, AS WELL AS HAVING A GREATER NATURAL
INTEREST IN THESE REGIONS, HAVE AN ADVANTAGE OVER US IN
CANBERRA BY VIRTUE OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL CONDITIONS
AND THEIR LONGER EXPERIENCE IN ADMINISTERING THE REMOTE
AREAS OF THEIR STATES.

NOTHING I SAY TODAY, AND NOTHING WE ENVISAGE THIS NEW COUNCIL DOING, SHOULD BE TAKEN AS A CRITICISM OF THE EFFORTS OF THE STATE GOVERNMENTS AND NORTHERN TERRITORY ADMINISTRATIONS IN DEVELOPING THE NORTH. THEY HAVE DONE A GREAT DEAL. IT IS MY INTENTION, HOWEVER, TO SEE THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE STATES, PLAYS ITS FULL PART IN THESE ENDEAVOURS, AND THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTH HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES FOR A FULL AND PROSPEROUS LIFE AS ALL OTHER AUSTRALIANS. THERE WILL BE NO MORE SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS; THERE WILL BE NO MORE SECOND-CLASS REGIONS.

I THINK I CAN CLAIM THAT MY GOVERNMENT, MORE THAN ANY OTHER IN THE HISTORY OF FEDERAL POLITICS, IS COMMITTED TO THE TASK AND THE CHALLENGE OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT. THAT COMMITMENT WAS EXPRESSED IN MY POLICY SPEECH A YEAR AGO. IT WAS REFLECTED IN THE DECISION - ONE OF THE FIRST ADMINISTRATIVE ACTS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT - TO ESTABLISH THE DEPARTMENT OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CO-ORDINATING DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF AUSTRALIA NORTH OF THE 26TH PARALLEL. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS REGION - RICH AS IT IS IN NATURAL RESOURCES AND PASTORAL AND AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL - SHOULD RECEIVE A RECOGNITION FROM THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT COMMENSURATE WITH ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL ECONOMY. IN ANY ANALYSIS, THE NORTH CONTRIBUTES AS MUCH AS ANY OTHER SECTOR OF AUSTRALIA TO OUR EARNINGS AND OUR STANDARD OF LIVING.

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS ALWAYS RECOGNISED THE PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES OF DEVELOPING THE NORTH - THE HIGHER COSTS OF PROJECTS IN REMOTE AND DIFFICULT ENVIRONMENTS, THE NEED FOR SPECIAL WAGE AND OTHER INCENTIVES TO ATTRACT WORKERS, THE HIGHER COST OF HOUSING AND TRANSPORT, CAPITAL EQUIPMENT, BUILDINGS, POWER, AND FERTILISERS. THESE FACTORS, AND OUR HISTORICAL PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT, HAVE PUT SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA IN A POSITION OF GREAT COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OVER THE NORTH. THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PAST DECADE ALONE, HOWEVER, HAVE CLEARLY SHOWN US THE REAL POSSIBILITIES OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA. THE MORE WE TAKE HOLD OF THESE OPPORTUNITIES AND ENLARGE THE RANGE OF LIFE STYLES OPEN TO ALL AUSTRALIANS, THE MORE WE ENRICH OUR NATIONAL CULTURE. AUSTRALIA'S SENSE OF NATIONHOOD WILL NEVER BE FULLY REALISED WHILE OUR POLICIES AND PRE-OCCUPATIONS REMAIN LARGELY CONFINED TO A TRIANGLE IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF THE CONTINENT FROM BRISBANE TO ADELAIDE AND ANOTHER IN THE SOUTH-WEST FROM PERTH TO ALBANY.

IN MY POLICY SPEECH A YEAR AGO I SAID THIS -
"LABOR'S OBJECTIVE IS TO DEVELOP THE VAST AND VALUABLE RESOURCES OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATION AND FUTURE AUSTRALIANS ... IT IS IN THE NORTH THAT THE GREAT SUGAR AND CATTLE INDUSTRIES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED AND IT IS IN THE NORTH THAT AUSTRALIANS FACE THE GREATEST CHALLENGE TO RETAIN THE OWNERSHIP OF THE NATION'S RESOURCES AND TO BASE NEW INDUSTRIES ON THOSE RESOURCES."

THE PURPOSE OF THIS COUNCIL IS TO DEVELOP MEASURES DESIGNED TO PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA AND THE WELFARE OF ITS PEOPLE. IT WILL INITIATE WHATEVER STUDIES AND INVESTIGATIONS IT CONSIDERS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE THESE OBJECTIVES. THIS IS A COMPREHENSIVE MANDATE. I GIVE AN ASSURANCE THAT IF THE POLICIES YOU AGREE UPON REQUIRE SPECIAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WILL SYMPATHETICALLY EXAMINE SUCH PROPOSALS IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE STATES.

MY GOVERNMENT'S BROAD NATIONAL OBJECTIVES ARE NOW GENERALLY WELL KNOWN. THEY APPLY EQUALLY TO THE NORTH. WE WANT STRONG AND CONTINUING ECONOMIC GROWTH - IN THE NORTH AS WELL AS THE SOUTH. OUR ECONOMIC PLANNING IS DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE GREATER AUSTRALIAN OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN INDUSTRY, MAXIMUM PROCESSING OF OUR RESOURCES AND FAIR EXPORT PRICES. AT ALL TIMES DUE ACCOUNT WILL BE TAKEN OF THE NEEDS OF CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND ABORIGINAL RIGHTS. I BELIEVE THAT THESE OBJECTIVES REFLECT THE FEELINGS AND ASPIRATIONS OF MOST AUSTRALIANS. I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE PURSUIT OF THESE OBJECTIVES WILL CREATE UNDUE DIFFICULTIES FOR OUR INDUSTRIES, INCLUDING THE MINING INDUSTRY. IT WILL, HOWEVER, REQUIRE CO-OPERATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY IN THE PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF MAJOR DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS.

THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR SUCH CO-OPERATION AND PLANNING. DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE PAST - NEW TOWNSHIPS, RAILWAYS AND PORTS, PARTICULARLY IN THE NORTH - FREQUENTLY WENT AHEAD WITHOUT REGARD FOR OVERALL NATIONAL POLICY OR NEEDS. WE MUST ENSURE THAT FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IS GUIDED BY NATIONAL AS WELL AS LOCAL CONSIDERATIONS. SUCH NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE BEHIND THE IMAGINATIVE PILBARA DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT WHICH IS NOW THE SUBJECT OF JOINT DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE AUSTRALIAN AND WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS. WE WANT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW REGIONAL CENTRE, WITH CHEAP POWER, CO-ORDINATED TRANSPORT AND PORT FACILITIES, TO BE PLANNED IN A WAY THAT WILL PERMIT THE BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESOURCES IN THE REGION TO THE MUTUAL ADVANTAGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, THE NATION AND THE PARTICIPATING COMMERCIAL INTERESTS. MUCH THE SAME THINKING LIES BEHIND MY GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVE IN PROVIDING FUNDS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF THE RESOURCES OF THE BURDEKIN AND BOWEN BASINS IN QUEENSLAND.

I EMPHASISE THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS NOT PREPARED TO ALLOW THE TEMPO AND DETAIL OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT TO BE DETERMINED BY MARKET FORCES ALONE. IF WE WERE TO DO SO, WE WOULD PERPETUATE THE CONDITIONS WHICH HAVE CHARACTERISED OUR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OVER THE PAST GENERATION. HISTORY MAY WELL JUDGE OUR GENERATION HARSHLY WHEN IT IS RECALLED THAT 83% OF OUR TOTAL POPULATION INCREASE OF NEARLY 5 MILLION PEOPLE SINCE 1949 HAS OCCURRED IN THE CAPITAL CITIES, AND OVER 50% HAVE SETTLED IN SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE ALONE.

I AM NOT CONCERNED TODAY TO DISCUSS THE GROWING PROBLEMS OF OUR CITIES. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY TAKEN CERTAIN STEPS TO ALLEVIATE THE MORE PRESSING OF THESE PROBLEMS. IT WOULD, HOWEVER, BE WHOLLY CONSISTENT WITH OUR POLICIES OF URBAN RENEWAL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW GROWTH CENTRES IF THE TEMPO OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT WERE INCREASED, AND GREATER INCENTIVES WERE PROVIDED FOR MORE AND MORE PEOPLE TO MOVE TO THE SPARSELY POPULATED NORTHERN REGIONS OF AUSTRALIA.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS INAUGURAL MEETING IS TO CONSIDER THE PROCEDURES AND ARRANGEMENTS TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE COUNCIL IN FUTURE. I HOPE THE COUNCIL WILL MEET REGULARLY - AT LEAST TWICE A YEAR - IN ORDER TO AVOID THE AD HOC APPROACH TO NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT IN THE PAST. MY GOVERNMENT - AND I WOULD EXPECT FUTURE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS - WILL LOOK INCREASINGLY TO THIS COUNCIL FOR SOUND ADVICE ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF THE NORTH. WE KNOW OF THE RESOURCES AND THE DIFFICULTIES WELL ENOUGH. WHAT ALL OUR GOVERNMENTS NEED IS DETAILED AND EXPERT ADVICE ON HOW TO DEVELOP THOSE RESOURCES AND OVERCOME THOSE DIFFICULTIES. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THIS COUNCIL MARKS A NEW PHASE IN FEDERAL-STATE RELATIONS IN A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT AREA OF UNDOUBTED NATIONAL IMPORTANCE. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THIS COUNCIL WILL BRING NEW VIGOUR AND NEW IDEAS TO OUR POLICIES FOR NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT AND MAKE A MOST SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROGRESS OF OUR NATION AND THE LIVING STANDARDS OF ITS PEOPLE.