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PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
TUESDAY 4 DECEMBER 1973

QUESTION: Prime Minister, the Director of General Motors yesterday said that his company believed that Australian equity in General Motors Australia would reduce the quality of its product. Would you agree that this policy of not allowing Australian equity conflicts with the thrust of the Government's policy. Why have previous Governments refused General Motors Corporation of America permission to sell shares in Australia? Will you reverse this policy if equity in General Motors Australia is not forthcoming and do you agree that there should be only three car makers in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not responsible for the policy of previous Governments. The Australian Government has asked the Tariff Board to report on the general overall position of the motor car industry. General Motors will be one of the companies, the present ones, giving evidence before the Tariff Board. I think one can well wait until the Tariff Board report comes to hand about all these features.

PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen: There are a few things that perhaps I should say myself first.

You will already have been told, I believe, that the Federal German Chancellor, Herr Willy Brandt, has accepted our invitation to visit Australia. The date of the visit will be decided next year. I have a press statement on this subject. This is the most significant visit from Europe since President Saragat visited us in September 1967. It is of very great gratification and significance to this country and our region.

There were quite a number of decisions that the Cabinet made yesterday.

We have decided to appoint a Committee of Inquiry on Retraining. The terms of reference will be into the role that training should play in an active manpower policy, the extent to which opportunities for training and retraining should be provided or improved, the broad methods of training and retraining that should be used, the methods of selecting respective trainees and of allocating trainees to prospective employers, the rationalisation of existing schemes of training and retraining and the level of allowances that should be paid to trainees, and the question of taxation in relation to such allowances. The Chairman of the committee will be Professor Donald Cochrane of Monash and the other members will be Mr Pat Clancy, Secretary of the Building Workers' Industrial Union, and Mr E. Donoghue, Proprietor of Donoghue Furniture Pty Ltd. Mr Jock Nelson has been appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory.

Mr William Worth has been appointed as the Australian Commissioner-General for the International Exposition on the Environment which, as I told you a week ago, we have decided to participate in at Spokane in Washington State between May and October next year. Mr Worth has already been Deputy Commissioner-General at Expo '67 in Montreal and Expo '70 in Osaka.

Then there are some decisions concerning tertiary education. We have approved the establishment of a university at Campbelltown and a university at Albury-Wodonga. The Minister for Education is arranging for the Universities Commission to undertake discussions with the appropriate authorities in New South Wales with a view to determining the way in which these universities might be constituted and with the Victorian authorities also as regarding Albury-Wodonga and developing proposals for special funds being made available during the remainder of this triennium should that prove necessary.

The Government has decided to provide a new medical school at the University of Newcastle and another at the James Cook University of North Queensland and to expand a number of existing medical schools as recommended in the report of the Committee on Medical Schools. The position of a medical school at Wollongong University and at the A.N.U. in Canberra is still being discussed.

The Government has decided to provide funds to support departments of or courses in community practice in medical schools of universities seeking to establish such programs in conjunction with community health centres supported or approved by the Interim Committee of the Hospitals and Health Services Commission. The funds for these departments or courses in community practice will be of the order of \$35,000 in the first year of operation and \$75,000 in the second and subsequent years and \$50,000 to provide teaching accommodation in each community health centre where such a centre is to be used in conjunction with a medical school. Also on hospitals, we have included in the 1973/74 Civil Works program proposals for Concord Repatriation Hospital. We have also approved the construction of a new hospital at Tennant Creek at a preliminary estimated cost of \$3½ million.

Then there are some matters concerning Canberra. We have considered the joint planning study carried out by officers of the Australian and New South Wales Governments about the growth of Canberra and the lands adjacent to the present borders of the Australian Capital Territory. The Government has authorised Mr Uren, the Minister for Urban and Regional Development and Mr Bryant, the Minister for the Capital Territory to enter into further discussions with the New South Wales Government. These discussions could explore the basis on which agreement may be reached on land acquisition and development for urban and associated purposes, for land acquisition for environmental protection purposes, including appropriate funding and cost recovery arrangements.

The Government has decided to call tenders for the construction of the Googong Dam to supply water for the Australian Capital Territory and Queanbeyan. The Minister for Urban and Regional Development is to confer with the New South Wales Government about the pollution of all waters downstream from Captains Flat and is arranging a meeting with the New South Wales representative.

Then about turtles. On 24 August I asked Senator Willesee, who was then the Special Minister of State, to arrange for expert studies into ecological and commercial aspects of the turtle farming projects being conducted in Northern Australia in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. Reports by Professors A.F. Carr and A.R. Main and Mr L.F. Smart have been presented and it is proposed to table them - probably tomorrow, I thought they would be tabled today but we have been unable to get the reports to the Premiers of Queensland and Western Australia in time, so we expect they will be tabled tomorrow. I have, however, telegraphed our decision to the Premiers so I can now read it to you. As a matter of fact, a great number of the decisions I have been reading to you have concerned the States and I had to wait until we telegraphed those decisions to the Premiers who will have them by now. The Government has approved continuation of the turtle industry as a pilot experimental project in which research is emphasised, as recommended by Professors Carr and Main, to determine the feasibility of developing the industry on the lines described by Mr Smart.

The Government has authorised the Attorney-General, Senator Murphy, to introduce a Family Law Bill. As with the Matrimonial Causes Bill 1959, it has been decided that this bill will be dealt with as a Government measure for the procedural purpose only of bringing the measure to a vote. All Government members will be entitled to a free vote and to move such amendments as they see fit. The bill will deal not only with matters upon which the Australian Parliament has already made laws but it will also deal with matters which under the Constitution can be the subject of legislation passed by the Australian Parliament but which hitherto has been dealt with by State Parliaments. In particular deserted wives and children's legislation and married women's property legislation. The legislation, of course, will be sent to the Premiers as I have telegraphed them.

Now, some matters of meat and drink. We have directed the Bureau of Agricultural Economics to investigate the costs involved in the marketing of cattle, sheep and pig meat with special reference to the composition of the margin between the prices paid to primary producers for animals slaughtered and the retail prices paid by consumers for their meat products. The wholesale prices of meat have been dropping but the retail prices don't seem to have been dropping proportionately, so the BAE is to inquire into the situation.

Then, brandy. I expect that this week we will be tabling the Tariff Board report on brandy. The Minister for Primary Industry and the Minister for Secondary Industry will establish a body to report to them on means of absorbing grape surpluses arising before any longer term restructuring or adjustment programs can be implemented. We expect this body to submit its first report by the middle of February. The new harvest, of course, is due in March. The whole difficulty of the brandy industry is that we produce more grapes for this purpose than we can absorb in the processed form.

Mr Hayden, the Minister for Social Security, will be giving you a statement about Social Services legislation. There is another item which I might mention. Pending legislation being introduced and passed the Government has approved pensions being paid as an act of grace to people overseas who are in extreme hardship and who have lived 30 years in Australia and have left Australia after reaching age pension age or were within five years of reaching age pension age at the time of departure. These resident's requirements will be waived where permanent incapacity or widowhood occurred in Australia.

Following on the decisions we announced a week ago concerning the mining licences and leases in the Northern Territory, the Government has decided to create a National Park in the Northern Territory to be called the Kakadu National Park. It will comprise 1450 square miles; it is to be gazetted along the original boundaries suggested by the Planning Committee for it. The position of uranium mining interests inside the Park will be reviewed in the light of this decision. This represents a major breakthrough in conservation in Australia. The park is one of truly international significance. It will become one of the great National Parks of the world. The Government will also be considering making further additions to it. It is as an important part of the National Estate as the Great Barrier Reef and Ayers Rock; it contains a wide diversity of important parts of the National Estate including sites of great importance to the Aboriginal people and some significant wetlands. Conservation interests regard Kakadu National Park as of importance at least equal to that of Lake Pedder. In this case, only the Australian Government is involved. By acting in this way the Australian Government is demonstrating to the Australian people that within its own territories, within its own jurisdiction, it is taking its responsibilities in conservation seriously.

The Government agreed to amend the Navigation Act to require ships to lodge voyage plans and subsequent position reports.

Are there any questions.

QUESTION: This morning Senator Cavanagh announced that he decided to dismiss Senator Georges from the Board of the main turtle company. Were you consulted in....

PRIME MINISTER: Senator Cavanagh is responsible here, he was asked a question and he answered it. I was asked a question and I answered it too. I have no further matters to say on this. It is the Minister's responsibility.

QUESTION: I understand the Director of the Rhodesian Information Centre, Mr Bradley, expected to leave Australia around December 13. Does the Australian Government intend to allow a new director to enter Australia to replace him?

PRIME MINISTER: Allow me to consider the situation when I see the passport. Quite clearly, I would think, the Australian Government would do nothing to promote this illegal activity.

QUESTION: Can I clear up one point on the turtles. Was it a Cabinet decision to reinstate Dr Bustard on the project?

PRIME MINISTER: Dr Bustard has never been mentioned in Cabinet.

QUESTION: Was it a Cabinet decision to....

PRIME MINISTER: Now Senator Cavanagh has answered questions on this matter. He has answered all these questions.

QUESTION: Was it his decision?

PRIME MINISTER: Of course, it is his responsibility and he is well able to fulfil it.

QUESTION: When you spoke of the Northern Territory uranium leases, he mentioned a decision a week ago on mining leases in the Northern Territory. I may have forgotten it, but I don't remember any decision that you publicly made on it.

PRIME MINISTER: I thought that Dr Patterson had made an announcement later.

QUESTION: No sir.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh well, I thank you for correcting me.

QUESTION: Can I now ask....

PRIME MINISTER: Well, no leave it....I will not be making any statement on it.

QUESTION: It has been reported that the South Australian Branch of the A.L.P. is doing nothing and the W.A. Branch is doing virtually nothing in support of the prices and incomes referendum, and if this is so, do you think they are acting contrary to the decision of the Federal Executive and do you think their reported lack of action would seriously jeopardise a successful YES vote on Saturday?

PRIME MINISTER: I only go on what is in the newspapers here. I am surprised if the reports are true because I believe they would be going against the letter and certainly the spirit of the Federal Executive decision on this matter. The Federal members in South Australia are, I know, taking steps themselves to see that the case for a YES vote in both the prices referendum and the incomes referendum is put properly to the people of South Australia. I, myself, have been in touch at first hand, as you know, in the last few days with both the Queensland Branch and the New South Wales Branch of the Labor Party and both are pursuing an active campaign in support of both the prices referendum and the incomes referendum. I haven't been in direct touch with the other branches for some time. I am visiting Perth next Friday.

QUESTION: Would the Government support an amendment moved by the Liberal Party in the Senate to the State Grants (Schools) Bill which added \$5 million to the Government's projected 694 million dollars cost in order to continue per capita grants to those schools which will lose out on the present needs policy which the Government is proposing?

PRIME MINISTER: There has been no amendment moved by any of the Opposition parties in the Senate to the State Grants (Schools) Bill which was passed by the House of Representatives a week ago. The bill will come up for debate in the Senate I suspect this week. Obviously the Government will consider any amendment or amendments which any Opposition party or parties move in the Senate when it or they is or are moved. I only have to go on the newspapers as to who speaks on behalf of the Opposition in these matters. I gather that there is some dispute as to whether Senator Rae is the Opposition spokesman on education or the Liberal Party spokesman on education and whether he is the spokesman in the whole Parliament or just in the Senate. I don't know whether Mr Malcolm Fraser is the spokesman for the Liberal Party in the whole Parliament or in the House of Representatives alone. He assumes many mantles and going by what you gentlemen report, his activities as self-appointed spokesman at least in education and labour and foreign policy has caused some distress to his colleagues who have been nominated by the Leader of the Opposition or have nominated themselves to these respective posts. It is all too confusing. I have no doubt a personal explanation will be sought tomorrow.

QUESTION: Do you personally support the Karmel Committee's recommendation that per capita grants to A, B and C category schools should be phased out over two years?

PRIME MINISTER: I support the Government's decision on this matter. The Karmel Committee unanimously recommended a program for upgrading schools on the basis of needs by grants by the Australian Parliament for the scholastic years 1974 and 1975. It had this to say about category A schools: "Category A schools...or perhaps I suppose you will recall that the general objective of the Karmel Committee was to see that all schools in Australia should, in six years, by 1979, achieve a minimum standard of instruction and accommodation and equipment - that is by 1979 and it set targets for that purpose for the Government schools and the non-government schools and it categorized the non-government schools A to H. It had this to say: "Category A schools already use a volume of resources that well exceeds the 1979 targets; and the Committee believes that Government assistance to these schools cannot be justified." I would agree as an individual with that finding and the Government agrees with that finding. The Committee proceeded: "However all schools are presently receiving \$62 per annum per primary pupil and \$104 per annum per secondary pupil. The Committee feels that the sudden termination of financial aid on six months' notice could place some schools within category A in temporary difficulty". I interpose there because you will remember that the report of the Committee was made at the end of last May. "Hence the gradual phasing out of assistance over 1974 and 1975 is recommended. This implies that in 1976 schools whose resource falls in category A should receive no general recurrent assistance". Now the Government believes that in view of the findings of the Karmel Committee - the unanimous finding of the Karmel Committee, this committee drawn from all types of schools in Australia - that Government assistance to category A schools cannot be justified. The Government believes that in view of that finding by the Committee, we didn't believe that we could justify the additional expenditure involved in paying these category A schools these amounts during 1974 and 1975. You will notice that this finding was made...the sudden termination of financial aid on six months' notice is...it was, in fact, a bit more than six months' notice.

COMMENT: Seven months.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes but the schools don't open until February do they? It would have been eight months' notice really wouldn't it?.... "Could place some schools within category A in temporary difficulties!" There has been quite a deal of reassessment by the Karmel Committee of the schools which it originally placed in category A. A great number of those schools have now been placed in lower categories and accordingly would continue under the Government's decision to receive the amounts that the Karmel Committee unanimously recommended. Now I would imagine that now there would be no schools which, in the Karmel Committee's view, would be in temporary difficulty if they did not receive those amounts in 1974 and 1975.

QUESTION: Is your rejection of that recommendation quite irreversible?

PRIME MINISTER: I have already answered a question about this on the basis that there might be amendments moved in the Senate.

QUESTION: Is it irreversible?

PRIME MINISTER: I said that we would consider any amendments moved in the Senate when they are moved.

QUESTION: Your announcement of the appointment of an Administrator to the Northern Territory after such a long time without one where there was a fairly easy devolution of power to the Secretary of the Department of the Northern Territory which you created. In view of the fact that there is no longer a Northern Territory administration, what was the need to complicate the administration of the territory by appointing Mr Nelson to this largely redundant and archaic post up there?

PRIME MINISTER: The position is not archaic or redundant until some of the Acts covering the Northern Territory are amended. The Government is committed to proposing some form - augmented form - of self-government for the Northern Territory before the end of 1974. You will remember that the Party discussed this at the Federal Conference in Surfers Paradise in July. I haven't got the platform with me but I am pretty sure I correctly state it that the Government is committed to introduce a form of augmented self-government in the Northern Territory by the end of 1974. Until the amendments have been made to the Act covering the Northern Territory there are still responsibilities falling to the Administrator. He is named in those Acts, and there can be something inappropriate or embarrassing in the Secretary of the Department of the Northern Territory purporting to disallow or suggest amendments to ordinances passed by the Legislative Council of the Northern Territory. Furthermore, it wouldn't be proper to reserve all ordinances to the Governor-General. We could use that device, but it is more appropriate to have an Administrator performing the functions which the statutes still impose on a person holding such a position. I would expect that Mr Nelson will hold the position until the end of next year.

QUESTION: Does the Government intend to bring the States Grants (Schools) Bill to a vote in the Senate this session of Parliament?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, certainly.

QUESTION: If the Senate votes to defeat Clause 66 in the Bill, will the Government then reconsider the Bill in the House of Representatives during this session of Parliament?

PRIME MINISTER: I would expect the Government would not accept the continuation of the 1972 legislation. Clause 66 of the States Grants (Schools) Bill 1973 repeals the operation of the States Grants (Schools) Bill 1972 in respect of the next four scholastic years - 1974, 1975, 1976 and 1977. In the House of Representatives you will remember that Mr Malcolm Fraser, the only Opposition member to speak on the clause, urged the defeat of that repealing clause in the Bill and all the members of the Opposition in the House of Representatives at the time voted to defeat - to delete Clause 66. Obviously the effect would have been and Mr Fraser expressed the objective of retaining the 1972 legislation. Now the 1972 legislation proceeds on a completely different basis and philosophy to the 1973 legislation. The 1972 legislation made no provision for Government schools and it made the same provision per pupil of all non-government schools whether they were in category A, B, C, D, E, F, G. or H. The 1973 bill which the Government introduced and which the House of Representatives passed and which the Senate is to consider this week, makes provision for Government schools; it makes varied provision - graduated provision - for non-government schools according to their needs. The total provision in the 1973 Bill is three times that in the 1972 Bill. The Government quite clearly would not accept the continuation of the 1972 Act. However, the Senate would have to agree to the repeal of the 1972 Act. The Government would not accept the 1973 Bill without the repeal - the deletion of the 1972 Act.

QUESTION: There would be no point in taking it back to the Reps this session if the Senate did not agree to vote for Clause 66?

PRIME MINISTER: It would depend, of course, on the form in which the Senate dealt with the Bill. It might move amendments or purport to. There is, of course, clearly the question whether the Senate could carry an amendment which increased expenditure because expenditure cannot be above the amount which the Governor-General asks by his message to each House. The Senate might, however, make a request. Now obviously, one waits to see what form any motion in the Senate takes.

QUESTION: If the Senate rejects Clause 66, that's it for this session Parliament, is it?

PRIME MINISTER: Well there again one has to wait to see if there are any other motions that the Senate carries in respect to the States Grants (Schools) Bill 1973. But even if the only thing it does is to delete Clause 66, i.e. continue the 1972 Act, even if that is all it does, it will have to come back to the House of Representatives to see if the House accepted the Bill as so amended.

QUESTION: This session or next session?

PRIME MINISTER: Well it depends on what days we are sitting. I would expect the Senate would decide that matter this week, and in those circumstances, the House of Representatives can consider it this week or next.

QUESTION: If the Senate makes a request for an amendment will you consider that....well let's put it this way: Before you consider it will they have to repeal Section 66 of the present Schools Bill?

PRIME MINISTER: It is not for me to suggest amendments or requests in the Senate. It is really up to the various personalities in the Liberal Party and each House and various Opposition parties to sort this matter out for themselves. But it would be quite easy, I image, for the Senate to carry motions or requests quite irrespective of Clause 66. Clause 66, may I repeat, deletes or repeals last year's Act in its operation for the next four scholastic years.

QUESTION: What I am asking is will you consider....is it a proposition, a condition, to consider any request that they pass Section 66 for the repeal of the existing legislation. Is that a pre-condition before you will consider any request from the Senate?

PRIME MINISTER: I think I have made it quite clear on this. I don't believe the Government would accept the continuation of the per capita grants the same payment per pupil for the richest, best endowed, best staffed, best equipped, best housed schools in Australia as for the poorest. I don't believe that we would accept such a proposition. I don't believe the Australian people would accept such a proposition. After all, the proposal that Australian Government assistance for non-government schools should be allocated on the basis of needs as examined and recommended by an expert body was put to the people at the House of Representatives elections in 1969 and again at the House of Representatives elections in 1972. There can not have been a more thoroughly discussed proposal by any Government.

QUESTION: It was reported this week that an English predecessor of yours is now on a Government pension of \$23 a week. Do you see any inconsistency in the policy of your Government in gradually alleviating the means test on pensions but now applying it to school students?

PRIME MINISTER: There is no....this is one of the oldest furrphies and cliches in controversy, the idea that there is now some parallel between the grants which the Australian Government makes to assist schools and the payments it makes to retired people. Now there is no similarity between - I mean you are a newcomer to these conferences but I don't think anybody has put this up at such a gathering for years - there is no means test applied to the parents of school pupils; there is, in fact, an assessment of the school itself. What services, what facilities does the school provide, and that is capable of computation and a highly skilled committee has made a computation of this before the end of last May and nobody has cavilled at their computation. The people have done their sums afresh, they have looked at it afresh. Now, you do mention the case of a former Prime Minister, who has sought and received the age pension. He is perfectly entitled to do so and retired Prime Ministers in Britain and Canada have received age pensions for years.

QUESTION: I don't quarrel with that case, but it just seems to me that there are two cases of means test policy.

PRIME MINISTER: I still can't see the comparison.

Laurie Oakes from the Sun, Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: I have been waiting and this is the last.

OAKES: I am not going to ask whether you have read any good books lately. Mr Hamer....

PRIME MINISTER: I have read books on excellent subjects.

QUESTION: Mr Hamer said today that he would like a national conference on the energy crisis. Could we have your reaction to that suggestion?

PRIME MINISTER: The matter is well in hand. I have mentioned this before and Mr Connor has answered questions on it already. My ministers and I have the whole question under constant surveillance and if there is any matter where the State Governments need to assist, and there might be such matters in the field of distribution, then we would very promptly do so. We would welcome their co-operation in any such matters. But the question of importation of oil and petrol is not a matter for State Governments - it never has been - it is a matter for the Australian Government and I would take the opportunity to repeat that Australia is more fortunately situated than most countries in respect to energy resources and also the importation of those resources where we are not self-sufficient.

QUESTION: In the light of the reported threats against Mr Hawke and his family, has any Commonwealth authority been instructed to investigate and report the existence of Arab activeness in Australia and the degree of their activities?

PRIME MINISTER: The usual procedures are in operation and have been both before and after the reports which you have quoted. Gentlemen, I don't encourage questions on these matters as you know. Every body in public life is aware of these matters and deprecates the discussion of them. My predecessors did, I shall.
