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DEPARTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
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PRIME MINISTER

Press Statement NO. 247

2 May 1974

NATIONAL WAGE CASE

The Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, said today the Government would co-operate fully in the conference to be called by the President of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, Mr. Justice Moore, to discuss wage fixation measures and automatic cost of living adjustments. He welcomed the call by Mr. Justice Moore in yesterday's National Wage Case judgement for a conference of parties to the case to discuss new wage fixation measures and wage indexation.

Many parties before the National Wage hearing including the Australian Government had expressed dissatisfaction with the present wage environment. A conference as proposed by Mr. Justice Moore could be valuable in settling this dissatisfaction.

The overall decisions on the total wage and minimum wage for men and women and the first step towards cost of living adjustments vindicated the positive intervention by the Australian Government in sharp contrast to the negativism of previous Liberal/Country Party administrations.

Mr. Whitlam in particular welcomed the increases awarded to all people - men and women - on the minimum wage. He regretted however that submissions seeking the automatic adjustment of wages in line with the cost of living had not been accepted at the present time. A positive decision now about indexation would almost certainly have led to a moderation in future trade union demands for wage increases. He said he hoped that the introduction of such a system would follow the conference.

The decision on the minimum wage was completely in line with the social priorities of the Labor Government. It recognised that there were many cases of genuine need and distress among many wage earners in the community.

The decision to bring the minimum wage for women up to the level determined for men was an historic one. It was an important step towards the implementation of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, which the Labor Government has consistently supported. The Government had strongly supported the A.C.T.U. claim for an equal minimum wage for women.

The Prime Minister welcomed the vote of confidence in the strength of the economy which this part of the Commission's decision indicates.

In their discussions on recent economic trends, the Commission notes the strong position of the Australian economy and draws particular attention to the strength of both consumer demand and private capital expenditure.

While noting the arguments put by all parties, including the Australian Government, regarding the importance at the moment of inflation, the Commission indicated that none of the parties to the case had questioned the appropriateness of the government's counter-inflationary policies.

PERTH. W.A.