

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
FOR THE OPENING OF THE CAIRNS CIVIC CENTRE,
CAIRNS, QUEENSLAND,
FRIDAY 31 MAY 1974

THIS IS A VERY HAPPY OCCASION FOR ME. WHATEVER YOU MAY THINK OF MY FEELINGS TOWARDS QUEENSLAND, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT ABOUT MY FEELINGS TOWARDS CAIRNS. I CAME HERE FOR A FEW DAYS JUST BEFORE THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN; I AM HERE AGAIN IMMEDIATELY AFTER IT. I AM DELIGHTED THAT MY FIRST OFFICIAL DUTY SINCE THE RE-ELECTION OF THE GOVERNMENT IS TO OPEN THIS SPLENDID CIVIC CENTRE IN CAIRNS. IT WILL CONFIRM YOUR POSITION AS ONE OF THE MOST PROSPEROUS AND DYNAMIC PROVINCIAL CITIES IN AUSTRALIA.

THE PLANNING OF THIS CENTRE BEGAN JUST TWO WEEKS AFTER THE GOVERNMENT WAS ELECTED IN 1972. I BELIEVE IT SYMBOLISES TWO OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PRINCIPAL CONCERNS: ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ARTS AND ITS COMMITMENT TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT. YOU HAVE BEGUN SOMETHING IN THIS CITY WHICH I HOPE WILL SERVE AS A MODEL NOT ONLY FOR THE REST OF QUEENSLAND BUT FOR THE WHOLE OF AUSTRALIA. OF ALL THE AUSTRALIAN STATES, QUEENSLAND IS BY FAR THE MOST DECENTRALISED. IT HAS MANY THRIVING RURAL CENTRES. THE VIGOUR, THE INDIVIDUALITY, THE VITALITY OF YOUR RURAL AND PROVINCIAL CITIES SHOW HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR OTHER STATES AND REGIONS TO CULTIVATE SIMILAR GROWTH CENTRES AWAY FROM THE CAPITAL CITIES.

TO DO SO IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT CITIES LIKE CAIRNS SHOULD ENJOY THE SAME FACILITIES FOR CULTURE AND RECREATION THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO THE PEOPLE OF BRISBANE, SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE. THIS CENTRE IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF WHAT CONCERNED AND VIGOROUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN ACHIEVE WITH THE SUPPORT AND CO-OPERATION OF YOUR STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE LOCAL PEOPLE. I CONGRATULATE ALL THOSE WHO HAVE WORKED FOR THIS BUILDING AND FOR THE IDEALS AND PURPOSES IT EMBODIES.

THERE IS, PERHAPS, AN ADDED SIGNIFICANCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURAL CENTRE HERE IN CAIRNS. YOU STAND AT THE MEETING POINT OF THREE CULTURES - THE EUROPEAN, THE ABORIGINAL AND THE TORRES STRAIT ISLAND. I BELIEVE YOU ARE IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO ABSORB AND DISSEMINATE IDEAS AND STYLES WHICH ^{MAY} WELL PROVE, IN THE LONGER PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY, TO BE OF IMPORTANCE TO THE WHOLE WORLD.

WHEN MY GOVERNMENT SET OUT TO IMPLEMENT ITS POLICY IN THE ARTS IT FACED SOME DIFFICULT DECISIONS. THEY SPRANG FROM THE FACT THAT WHILE AUSTRALIA WAS RICH IN ARTISTIC TALENT, AND PROBABLY POTENTIALLY RICHER THAN ANYONE CAN EASILY IMAGINE, IT LACKED THE RESOURCES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAT TALENT. VAST AREAS OF THE COUNTRY WERE WITHOUT EITHER THE PEOPLE OR THE PLACES WHICH COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTS. YET IF WE WERE TO DEVOTE OUR AVAILABLE FUNDS TO BUILDING THE PLACES, WE WOULD NOT HAVE THE FUNDS TO SPEND ON THE PEOPLE.

SO WE WERE FORCED TO ESTABLISH CERTAIN PRIORITIES, AND OUR PRIORITIES WERE THESE: FIRST, TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES, TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE; THEN TO SUPPORT THE TRAINING OF ARTISTS, WHICH WOULD PRODUCE THE NEXT GENERATION OF CREATIVE TALENT; THEN TO SUPPORT ACTIVITIES WHICH WOULD INVOLVE COMMUNITIES, TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND ENSURE AUDIENCES, WITHOUT WHICH NO ARTIST CAN SURVIVE; AND FINALLY TO COLLABORATE WITH OTHER BODIES, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, TO GIVE THE ARTS A BROADER BASE OF SUPPORT THAN A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ALONE CAN PROVIDE.

I AM GLAD TO SEE THAT HERE IN CAIRNS WE HAVE A PROJECT IN WHICH ALL THESE OBJECTIVES CAN BE ACHIEVED. YOU HAVE CHOSEN BY YOUR OWN INITIATIVE TO CREATE A CENTRE OF ACTIVITY, AND YOU HAVE HAD THE SUPPORT OF YOUR STATE GOVERNMENT IN DOING SO. YOU WILL BE LOOKING TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FOR SUPPORT FOR THE ACTIVITIES HERE, AND SO LONG AS YOU AIM FOR EXCELLENCE AND FOR THE WIDEST COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, THAT SUPPORT WILL NOT BE LACKING.

THE ORGANISATION OF THIS CENTRE SHOWS THAT YOU HAVE GOT YOUR PRIORITIES RIGHT, EXACTLY RIGHT. THE CITIES OF THE WORLD ARE LITTERED WITH BUILDINGS ERECTED WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS, BUT WITH A POOR UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEEDS OF THE ARTS AND THE NEED OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES. CAIRNS IN THE FUTURE WILL HAVE SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT; A BUILDING CREATED IN RESPONSE TO LOCAL NEEDS.

THE FACT IS THAT MANY OF THE MOST ORIGINAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE ENTERPRISES IN THE ARTS HAVE COME FROM QUEENSLAND. YOU DEVELOPED THE IDEA OF THE FLYING ARTS SCHOOL; YOU HAVE MADE GREAT PROGRESS IN SUCH FIELDS AS YOUTH ORCHESTRAS AND YOUNG OPERA GROUPS. YOU HAVE MANAGED TO BUILD UP A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES WHICH SERVE THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE WELL AND DO YOU GREAT CREDIT. I MIGHT MENTION THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, THROUGH THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS AND ITS BOARDS, HAS ALREADY GIVEN MORE THAN \$500,000 IN VARIOUS FORMS OF SUPPORT TO THE STATE, AND A GOOD PART OF IT HAS GONE TO THE NORTHERN PART OF QUEENSLAND.

IN THE PERFORMING ARTS, \$130,000 HAS GONE TO THE QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY AND \$35,000 TO THE TWELFTH NIGHT THEATRE; THE QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY HAS RECEIVED \$25,000 AND THE QUEENSLAND OPERA COMPANY \$49,000. THE LARGEST SHARE OF THE LITERATURE BOARD GRANTS TOTALLING \$45,000 WENT TO INDIVIDUAL WRITERS TO ALLOW THEM MORE TIME FOR WRITING. THE VISUAL ARTS BOARD HAS GIVEN GRANTS TOTALLING \$57,000 TO INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS AS WELL AS \$21,000 TO THE EASTAUS ARTS SCHOOL, THE FLYING ARTS SCHOOL WHICH TAKES PAINTING TO OUTBACK AREAS; \$7,500 TO THE TOWNSVILLE ARTS SOCIETY AND VARIOUS AMOUNTS TO OTHER GROUPS SUCH AS THE SOCIETY OF SCULPTORS OF QUEENSLAND.

THE QUEENSLAND FESTIVAL OF ARTS RECEIVED A \$10,000 GRANT AND THE TOWNSVILLE PACIFIC FESTIVAL \$2,000; THE CHILDRENS CREATIVE ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATION \$3,040 AND THE MT. ISA CULTURAL VACATION SCHOOL \$2,130. CRAFTSMEN RECEIVED GRANTS TALLING \$42,000 AND MUSIC GENERALLY \$132,000. AMONG THE MUSIC GRANTS WAS ONE OF \$12,360 TO THE QUEENSLAND CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC TO MAINTAIN A STRING QUARTET IN RESIDENCE. ALONG WITH THESE GRANTS \$48,000 HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE QUEENSLAND DIVISION OF THE ARTS COUNCIL SPECIFICALLY FOR TOURING PERFORMANCES IN COUNTRY AREAS. THERE WAS ALSO A \$10,000 GRANT FROM THE FILM AND TELEVISION BOARD FOR THE PURCHASE OF EQUIPMENT FOR THE BRISBANE FILM-MAKERS CO-OPERATIVE.

OUR COMMITMENT TO THE ARTS MUST BE SEEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR COMMITMENT TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT, FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS, AND ENJOYMENT OF THE ARTS OFTEN REFLECT LOCAL NEEDS, LOCAL TASTES AND, IN MANY CASES, LOCAL CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES. BY PROMOTING MORE VIGOROUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT WE ARE THEREFORE CULTIVATING A MORE FERTILE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE ARTS CAN PROSPER. LET ME GIVE YOU SOME IDEA OF WHAT WE HAVE DONE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN AUSTRALIA, AND PARTICULARLY IN QUEENSLAND. IN MY POLICY SPEECH FOR THE 1972 ELECTIONS I SAID: "LET THERE BE NO MISTAKE ABOUT LABOR'S DETERMINATION TO MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT A GENUINE PARTNER IN THE FEDERAL SYSTEM." THAT DETERMINATION STILL STANDS. IT WAS REITERATED IN MY POLICY SPEECH FOR THE ELECTION ON 18 MAY IN THESE TERMS:

"WE HAVE SOUGHT TO MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT A GENUINE PARTNER IN AUSTRALIA'S FEDERAL SYSTEM. WE HAVE REMODELLED THE GRANTS COMMISSION TO ALLOW LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES TO MAKE SUBMISSIONS AND TO ALLOW THE COMMISSION TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE AMOUNTS OF MONEY NEEDED TO REDUCE INEQUALITIES BETWEEN REGIONS AND WITHIN STATES AS TRADITIONALLY IT USED TO DO AS BETWEEN THE STATES.

"THE ROLE WE ASSIGN TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS THE REAL ANSWER TO CHARGES OF CENTRALISM. UNDER A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS WE HAVE PROVIDED LOCAL GOVERNMENT WITH THE FUNDS TO UNDERTAKE A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES PREVIOUSLY INADEQUATELY CARRIED OUT OR TOTALLY NEGLECTED. THE AUSTRALIAN ASSISTANCE PLAN, THE PROGRAMS FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH, AREA IMPROVEMENT, THE NATIONAL ESTATE, THE ARTS, TOURISM AND RECREATION AND ABORIGINES - ALL THESE PROVIDE FUNDS FOR COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES TO BE ORGANISED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT. WE DELIBERATELY HAVE MADE AND SHALL MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT A VEHICLE FOR OUR LEGISLATION ON AGED PERSONS' HOMES AND HOSTELS, SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT, HANDICAPPED CHILDREN, MEALS ON WHEELS, HOME CARE AND NURSING, NURSING HOMES AND HOMELESS MEN AND WOMEN. THESE ARE ALL ACTIVITIES WHICH CANNOT BE CLOSELY REGULATED FROM THE CENTRE AND ARE BEST PLANNED AND IMPLEMENTED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES. THEY JUSTIFY ASSISTANCE FROM THE NATION'S FINANCES BUT NOT INCREASES IN RATES.

"WE INSISTED ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION AT THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSTITUTION IN SEPTEMBER LAST YEAR. WE MADE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION A CONDITION OF PARTICIPATION BY THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT.

"AT THAT CONVENTION I PUT THE CASE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION ON THE LOAN COUNCIL. THE PREMIERS THEN, AND AT A SPECIAL PREMIERS' CONFERENCE IN OCTOBER, TURNED DOWN OUR PROPOSAL THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE A VOICE AND A VOTE IN THE LOAN COUNCIL."

WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRES IN QUEENSLAND. AFTER CONSULTATION WITH STATE AUTHORITIES, THE CITIES COMMISSION IN 1973 UNDERTOOK INITIAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES OF THREE AREAS IN QUEENSLAND - TOWNSVILLE, THE FITZROY REGION AND THE MORETON REGION. OUR BUDGET LAST YEAR ALLOCATED \$4.4 MILLION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE REGIONS IN THE CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR. A REQUEST FOR A DEVELOPMENT FEASIBILITY STUDY OF THE CAIRNS REGION HAS BEEN RECEIVED BY THE CITIES COMMISSION FROM THE FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND DEVELOPMENT BUREAU. THIS HAS BEEN SUPPORTED BY THE CAIRNS CITY COUNCIL. THE COMMISSION HAS INDICATED TO THE COUNCIL AND THE BUREAU THAT IT WILL CONSIDER THIS REQUEST WHEN ITS FUTURE STUDIES PROGRAM IS BEING PREPARED. OFFICERS OF THE COMMISSION HAVE DISCUSSED THIS MATTER, AND OTHER MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST, WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COUNCIL AND THE BUREAU.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OTHER PROJECTS I SHOULD MENTION THAT ARE OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO CAIRNS. NEW AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICES IN CAIRNS WERE COMPLETED IN DECEMBER 1973 AT A COST OF \$730,000. A TELEPHONE ENGINEERING CENTRE AND MOTOR VEHICLE REPAIR CENTRE ARE UNDER CONSTRUCTION AT A COST OF \$760,000. IN ADDITION, WE ARE CARRYING OUT EXTENSIONS TO THE CAIRNS TELEPHONE EXCHANGE AT A COST OF \$760,000. WE ARE BUILDING A NEW WORKS DEPOT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION AT A COST OF \$154,000 AND EXTENDING THE LEVEE BANKS OF THE CAIRNS AIRPORT AT A COST OF \$158,000. PROPOSED ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE CAIRNS POST OFFICE WILL COST A FURTHER \$207,000.

I WANT TO LEAVE YOU IN NO DOUBT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUING CONCERN FOR THE PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CITY, YOUR REGION AND YOUR STATE. WITH THIS BUILDING, CAIRNS HAS PLACED ITSELF IN THE FOREFRONT OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS. IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO DECLARE OPEN THE FIRST STAGE OF YOUR CULTURAL COMPLEX. IT WILL GIVE ME GREATER AND CONTINUING PLEASURE TO REVISIT YOUR CITY, TO OBSERVE ITS GROWTH AND PROSPERITY, AND SEE THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION OF THIS NEW CIVIC CENTRE TO THE LIFE AND HAPPINESS OF YOUR CITIZENS.
