



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT

NO: 260

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

The Prime Minister, the Hon. E. G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., announced today that His Excellency, the Governor-General had appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into and report on the Australian Public Service.

Mr. Whitlam said that the appointment of the Royal Commission confirmed the undertaking first given by the government last December, when Mr. Barnard had announced that a Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service would be appointed upon receipt of the Post Office Inquiry Report.

Mr. Whitlam went on to say that as the Vernon Commission Report had been received and its major recommendations accepted, the Government had now appointed the promised Royal Commission into the Public Service.

In announcing the appointment of the Royal Commission Mr. Whitlam recalled that in his policy speech, given on 29 April he had said:

..."To promote further the efficiency of the Australian Public Service, we shall establish a Royal Commission. It will be headed by one of Australia's most distinguished and experienced former public servants - a great servant of the Australian people - Dr. H. C. Coombs".

Mr. Whitlam said he was delighted that Dr. Coombs had agreed to accept the Commission and that he would be so ably assisted by the other Commissioners chosen.

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The Prime Minister also announced that to assist Dr Coombs in his Commission, the Governor-General had appointed Mr P.H. Bailey, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Professor Enid Campbell, Sir Isaac Isaacs Professor of Law at Monash University; the Hon. J.E. Isaac, Deputy President of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission; and Mr P.R. Munro, Secretary of the Council of Commonwealth Public Service Organisations, as Commissioners. The Commission would be assisted by Dr P.S. Wilenski, who the Prime Minister announced would be seconded to the Commission as its Special Advisor.

Mr Whitlam went on to say that there had not been a comprehensive inquiry into the Australian Public Service since 1920. He said that in recent years many countries had appointed Inquiries into their Public Services. Amongst these were Canada in 1962 by the Glassco Commission, and Britain in 1968 by the Fulton Committee. As well, Ireland and Germany had conducted wide ranging Inquiries into their Public Services. Mr Whitlam said he had been informed that a Royal Commission would be welcomed by all the Australian Public Service staff associations and trade unions. He had also been informed by the Public Service Board that it would welcome a Royal Commission.

Mr Whitlam reiterated the view expressed in his Garran Oration in November 1973, that the Australian Public Service commanded universal respect for its professionalism and impartiality. However, the government was committed to modernising the national public administration. This began with the re-allocation of administrative functions and other initiatives taken by the Australian Government since December 1972. An important step in this process was the appointment of the Royal Commission into the Australian Post Office under the Chairmanship of Sir James Vernon. The government's decision to establish a Royal Commission into the Public Service was evidence of its desire to continue this process.

Mr Whitlam said that the Terms of Reference (attached) were wide ranging and comprehended all the matters which have been the subject of debate and representation to Government over a period of many years. He said that the Commission would examine the role, organisation and staffing of the Australian Public Service with a view to improving efficiency, economy, adaptability, industrial relations and the despatch of public business.

Mr Whitlam said it was expected that the Chairman of the Commission, Dr H.C. Coombs, would shortly announce arrangements for the conduct of hearings and for the submission of views by individuals and organisations.

The Prime Minister said that it was anticipated that the Commission would report within two years of its appointment, but that it could, if it wished, make interim reports on those matters about which it had concluded its deliberations.

Mr Whitlam said that the appointment of such a Commission was an historic development in Australian public administration and one which he hoped would lead to an Australian Public Service better equipped to meet the future needs of the Australian people and Australian Governments.

INQUIRY INTO THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

"... to inquire into and report upon the administrative organization and services of the Australian Government, and in particular -

- (1) the purposes, functions, organization and management of Australian Government Departments, statutory corporations and other authorities and the principal instruments of co-ordination of Australian Government administration and policy;
and
- (2) the structure and management of the Australian Public Service,

and to make recommendations for improving efficiency, economy, adaptability and industrial relations and the despatch of public business:

AND, without restricting the scope of your inquiry, We direct you, the said Commissioners, to give particular attention to the following matters:-

- (a) the appropriate role of ministerial departments, statutory corporations and other authorities;
- (b) relationship of the Australian Public Service and statutory corporations and other authorities with the Parliament, Ministers and the community;
- (c) parliamentary scrutiny and control of administration;
- (d) responsibility and accountability of public servants, and their participation in forming policy and making decisions;

- (e) adequacy of the machinery available to assess the relevance and economy of existing programs in meeting government objectives;
- (f) the extent to which central management of the Australian Public Service is necessary, and internal control and co-ordination in that Service, especially the functions of the Public Service Board, the Auditor-General and the Treasury;
- (g) centralization, decentralization and delegation of functions;
- (h) the principles applicable to staffing of statutory corporations and other authorities;
- (i) personnel policies and practices, including eligibility, recruitment, selection, appointment, tenure, training (especially management training), promotion, classification, discipline, morale and conditions of service of members of the Australian Public Service, both generally and in relation to particular classes of persons;
- (j) the determination of salaries, wages and other conditions of service of persons in the service of the Australian Government, including those serving overseas;
- (k) the rights of public servants as citizens; and
- (l) any other matters to which the attention of the Commission is particularly directed by the Prime Minister and in the course of the inquiry:

AND We further instruct you, the said Commissioners, that it is not intended that you should make special inquiry into, or special reference to, matters relating to postal and telecommunications services that were the subject of the inquiry made in accordance with the Letters Patent issued by Us on 22 February 1973, or to matters relating to superannuation. "