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PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 317

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**ROYAL COMMISSION INTO ALLEGATIONS CONCERNING SOME
AUSTRALIAN MARITIME UNIONS**

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, announced today that the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, in Executive Council, has appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into allegations of demands and payments affecting certain Australian Maritime unions.

Mr Whitlam said the Honourable John Bernard Sweeney, Judge of the Australian Industrial Court, had been appointed the Royal Commissioner and would be assisted by counsel.

The Prime Minister said the decision by the Australian Government to request the appointment of a Royal Commission was taken early this week after consultations between myself and the ministers responsible, Mr C.K. Jones and Mr C.R. Cameron. These consultations began as soon as information that such demands were being made became available to me.

After consideration by the ministers, the information was investigated by the relevant departments - the Department of Transport and the Department of Labor and Immigration, in consultation with the Attorney-General's Department. It was decided that the circumstances fully warranted the appointment of a member of the Australian judiciary as a Royal Commission to investigate the matters.

The Australian Government agrees with the declared policy of the Australian Council of Trade Unions in condemning the demands and payments allegedly made. The Government is gravely concerned by the public declaration by an official of one of the unions alleged to be involved that the A.C.T.U. decision would be defied. The Royal Commission will have wide powers to summon witnesses and documents.

The terms of reference for the Royal Commission are:

1. To enquire into and report on:
 - (a) whether any payments (other than those of a normal commercial nature or made pursuant to any law or industrial award or agreement) have in recent times been or are being made or demanded in respect of the use of ships in voyages to or from Australia, or within the Australian coasting trade under permit or licence under the Navigation Act 1912.
 - (b) the circumstances under which and the persons (including corporate bodies) by whom and to whom any such payments or demands have been made.
 - (c) the reasons for and the purpose of any such payments or demands.
 - (d) the subsequent or proposed use of or disposal of any such payments.
 - (e) the legality of any such payments and demands and their propriety having regard in particular to Australian trade union principles and ethics.
2. To recommend in the light of the Commission's findings:
 - (a) what action, if any, should be taken in respect of such payments.
 - (b) what legislative or administrative changes are necessary or desirable in relation to these matters.

It is expected that the first hearings of the Commission will be held at an early date.

CANBERRA. A.C.T