



PRIME MINISTER

16 January 1975

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER, DR. J.F. CAIRNS
HOBART TRAGEDY

The Acting Prime Minister, Dr. Cairns, announced today that he had sent a message to the Tasmanian Premier, Mr. Reece, informing him that the Australian Government would reimburse the State for the full amounts of expenditure incurred by it and its authorities as a result of the Hobart Bridge disaster. This had been agreed to by the Cabinet at its meeting in Sydney today. Dr. Cairns recalled that, immediately on hearing of the disaster, the Prime Minister had assured Mr. Reece of the full and ready co-operation of the Australian Government, and this had been followed up with an offer to provide up to \$13 million for reconstruction of the bridge, upgrading the road through Bridgewater and ferry terminals.

Dr. Cairns said that the Australian Government's commitment was subject to the various expenditures being accepted by it as attributable to the bridge collapse, and reasonable. It was not possible at this stage to estimate the ultimate level of Australian Government assistance. In the event that the State were to make any successful claims on the A.N.L. and/or their insurers, the Australian Government's assistance would be correspondingly reduced.

The Australian Government is preparing legislation to authorise the provision of this assistance to the State. It will be introduced as soon as possible after the Australian Parliament re-assembles in February.

Dr. Cairns also announced that a Committee of officials is to be established with the responsibility for co-ordinating Australian Government assistance. He had suggested to Mr. Reece that he might like to consider establishing a similar body for the State.

"I re-affirm that the Australian Government will do everything in its power, in co-operation with the State Government, to ensure that Hobart's immediate problems are overcome, and the bridge restored, as quickly as possible," Dr. Cairns said.

Cabinet resolved that the Minister for Repatriation and Compensation inquire into the adequacy of compensation payments for death and personal injury resulting from the Hobart Bridge disaster.

The Minister would then make recommendations to Cabinet as to whether an additional compensation would be paid by the Australian Government.

His recommendations would be in line with the Government's approach to the aftermath of the Darwin cyclone, its policy on the provision of compensation for victims of natural disasters, and its proposed national compensation scheme.

SYDNEY