



PRIME MINISTER

25 October 1975

OPENING OF BELLORANA LODGE, BELLINGEN

The Prime Minister Mr Whitlam said today that he was determined to press on with the ordinary business of government, despite the current constitutional crisis. Mr Whitlam was speaking in Coffs Harbour at the beginning of an official visit to Coffs Harbour and Bellingen.

Mr Whitlam said his visit to Bellingento open Bellorana had been a firm engagement since July when it had first been mentioned to him. He said that the degree of community involvement in the planning and building of Bellorana was an example of the kind of co-operation between the Australian Government and voluntary organisations which characterised the Australian Government's approach to social needs. Mr Whitlam has already opened old persons' homes and hostels in other New South Wales country areas this year including Ozanam Villa Hostel at Lismore and Blakeney Lodge at Tumut. These have been made possible through the Australian Government's decision to increase the former \$2 to \$1 subsidy for such establishments to \$4 for every \$1.

Mr Whitlam said he was looking forward to the Civic Welcome at Bellingen and his visit later in the day to the Coffs Harbour Council Chambers. He said he valued the sense of partnership which had grown up between local government and the Australian Labor Government. Last year the Australian Government had made direct grants to local government bodies for the first time. This year Bellingen Shire Council had received \$100,000, compared with \$77,000 last year, an increase of 29.9% while Coffs Harbour had received \$188,000 this year, compared with \$138,000 last year, an increase of 36.2%.

Mr Whitlam said that the Australian Government was determined to use its powers to increase equality of services and opportunity between regions. Last week the full High Court had ruled in favour of the Australian Government providing direct grants to the Australian Assistance Plan. This power had been challenged by the Victorian and New South Wales Governments. Had the State Governments' challenge been successful, it could have endangered federal grants for old peoples homes and hostels, such as "Bellorana" at Bellingen, as well as such services as meals on wheels, isolated childrens allowances and many other social welfare services. (A list of Australian Government expenditure in Bellingen and Coffs Harbour is attached. This list includes some programs which could have been affected by the High Court challenge.)