

*Mr. Yeend*



## PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

15 February 1976

### VISIT TO NEW SOUTH WALES FLOODS

The Prime Minister, Mr Malcolm Fraser, visited flood stricken areas of north western New South Wales today.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by Mrs Fraser, and by the Minister for Health, Ralph Hunt and the Deputy Director General of the Natural Disasters Organisation, Mr. R. Vardanega.

He visited Moree and Walgett, where he talked with local government officials and with representatives of the NSW State Emergency Service.

Mr Fraser's aircraft, an R.A.A.F. HS 748, overflew the flood areas of the North West at an altitude of about 500 feet.

The aerial tour ranged over Goondiwindi, Mungindi, Bogabilla, Collarenebri, Boomi and Wee Waa.

About one third of the houses in Moree were entered by floodwaters, which are now receding. Mr Fraser toured Moree and talked with townspeople whose houses had been flooded.

In Walgett, the town is readying itself for the full force of the floodwaters which have not yet arrived.

Officials say that stock losses in the North West are extensive. Although no figures have yet been worked out, sheep losses are described as huge and cattle losses as drastic. Flying over the area, the Prime Minister saw flooding extending to the horizon, cattle and sheep huddled on high ground or standing in floodwaters, and the bodies of sheep, washed against fences.

Mr Fraser said emergency services appeared to be working satisfactorily, although he would be taking up matters raised with him.

They concerned the question of an emergency bridge to link Walgett with Lightning Ridge, improving the airstrips at Moree and Walgett, and of the cost of fodder airlifted to floodbound properties.

Mr Fraser said the Commonwealth would be participating fully with the States in the relief measures being undertaken and the reconstruction which would be necessary.

He said in the past assistance had been available for the relief of personal hardship, to help local government with public works, and in the form of loans to farmers at concessional rates of interest.

He said a decision would be made quickly on the question of fodder drops for starving stock.

In the past farmers had paid the full cost of the hay, with delivery by air drop being provided as a relief measure.

However, the current high cost of fodder, combined with low returns from livestock, indicated that this might not be sufficient during the current floods.

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