



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

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AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONERS CONFERENCE

I understand that this is the first of these conferences of Australasian Public Service Commissioners to be hosted by the Australian Public Service Board for some time.

I am informed that the conferences have been held on a regular basis since the first in Canberra in 1937. This is an impressive record of co-operation.

I am pleased to see delegates here from other countries in the region. Conferences of this kind are very useful exercises in inter-state and regional co-operation. We recognise the special duties which your organisations undertake and the special responsibilities you have.

There is great value in the concept of independent central personnel authorities in our system of administration.

Public Service Boards, if they do their job properly, are not likely to be popular. They have the invidious task of restraining any tendency by individual departments or permanent heads to "empire-build". They also have the responsibility of preserving comparability of standards in a large and significant area of employment. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that the well-being of public services in general depends greatly on the preservation of the independence and integrity of Public Service Boards and their equivalents.

Public Service Boards do of course have an important responsibility to contribute to the improvement in the quality and efficiency of public administration.

Consultations between members and senior officials of Public Service Boards from within Australia and overseas must facilitate a valuable exchange of information about ideas and trends in public administration.

My Government is greatly concerned with issues of administrative management and public sector efficiency.

Any Government is inevitably and properly faced with the limits of the resources available to it.

It is our aim to ensure that resources are related to need and are used to the fullest possible extent.

The public sector has to be a lean and efficient instrument of Government policy, able to provide a responsive administration. Our decisions to reduce the size of the Australian Public Service are consistent with this objective.

We are also concerned to press ahead with our policy of federalism which involves us examining the possibility of decentralising Government power and functions.

In doing so the Government relies to a very great degree on the efficiency, integrity and expertise of our Public Service at all levels. - in rationalising the operations and management of the bureaucracy and in facilitating the transfer of powers and functions between the Commonwealth and the states.

While on the question of the size of the public sector it is notable that the state administrations have grown rapidly, as did the Commonwealth Service, in recent years, and that there has been a major expansion of state spending and state activity.

The Government's policy of restraining growth in spending in the public sector, as part of our overall strategy for management of the Australian economy, clearly calls for complementary measures at the state level if it is to be fully successful.

The Government is at the moment considering a number of issues in relation to Government administration - issues which I am sure you will be discussing over the next few days.

For instance, we have established machinery to examine the many recommendations of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration and will be progressively announcing decisions on those recommendations. The Royal Commission has produced a great deal - the Government is closely examining present administrative practices and procedures in the light of the report.

The consideration of the report by Ministers, Department, and the Public Service Board can in some ways be regarded as a useful starting point for a wide-ranging examination of the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative procedures.

Quite apart from the report of the Royal Commission, the Australian Public Service has been making progress on a wide-range of administrative issues.

The Public Service Board's studies on manpower needs and the recently introduced Executive Development Scheme both cater for the need to ensure that the administration continues to maintain its high standards of policy advising and implementation.

These approaches are fully supported by this Government.

We recognise the need for the encouragement of equal employment opportunities in the Public Service Board and fully endorse the efforts of the Public Service in this field.

Proposals for staff exchanges between Commonwealth and State Departments, as well as with universities and business enterprises, are further means by which the skills and interests of staff can be developed and maintained.

I understand that you will be discussing all these matters during the Conference and I trust that you will develop cooperative ventures in these areas.

Mr Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to officially open the 20th Australiasian Public Service Commissioners' Conference and to extend a very warm welcome to all delegates and those wives who have accompanied them.

I hope that you will find the Conference and its associated activities to be both stimulating and satisfying.

To those guest from overseas, I would like to especially express a warm welcome and I hope your visit to Canberra will be a most enjoyable one.
