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PRIME MINISTER

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MEAT EXPORTS TO THE MIDDLE EAST

The Government has decided to send a two man team to the Middle East to look at the adequacy of cold storage facilities for Australian meat exported there.

The team will include a senior officer from each of the Department of Overseas Trade and Primary Industry. Arrangements for the mission are being put in hand immediately.

The Government is aware of the importance to Australian meat exporters of the Middle East trade. Australian meat exports to the region have grown rapidly in recent years. In 1975/76 exports of refrigerated sheep meat totalled 47,200 tonnes - a significant increase on the 13,400 tonnes exported in 1973/74. Exports of beef and veal to the Middle East have grown from 3,125 tonnes in 1973/74 to 15,656 tonnes in 1975/76. Over the same period exports of live sheep to the Middle East have grown from 900,000 to 1.7 million.

It is highly desirable that the Australian Government take whatever steps are appropriate to promote meat exports to this new and expanding market.

In view of the importance of the meat industry to the Australian economy and the difficulties being encountered in some of the more traditional markets, the Government believes that every effort should be made to enable greater diversification of overseas markets and to facilitate the export of meat in chilled and frozen forms.