

THE APPOINTMENT OF MR JUSTICE R.W. FOX
AS AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE

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I wish to inform the House that the Government has decided to appoint Mr Justice Fox as Ambassador-at-large for a period of twelve months. Mr Justice Fox's primary role will be to represent Australia overseas in international endeavours to secure a strengthened nuclear non-proliferation regime. He will represent the Government at international forums and in other initiatives dealing with nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear safeguards.

Mr Justice Fox was the Presiding Commissioner of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry established by the previous Government. After the Inquiry completed its final report in May 1977, Mr Justice Fox, on my request, pursued enquiries overseas relating to nuclear non-proliferation and safeguards. He has recently returned from this overseas visit during which he consulted more than 200 people - representing overseas agencies and individual interests - in various countries, amongst others the EEC countries, Sweden, Austria, Brazil, the United States, Canada and Japan, regarding safeguards against nuclear weapons proliferation and has reported to me on those discussions.

I regard Mr Justice Fox's advice as important in enabling the Government to pursue the most effective policy against the spread of nuclear weapons which is a matter of great international concern, and the most effective arrangements to remove the international instability associated with the spread of sensitive nuclear technology.

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It is clear from what he has told me that there is developing a greater international awareness of the importance of preventing proliferation of nuclear weapons. There are many international initiatives being developed in which Australia must be prepared to play its part.

One of the most important is the International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation which is being undertaken on the initiative of the President of the United States. It will evaluate all parts of the present nuclear fuel cycle with the aim of strengthening technology against diversion of nuclear materials to weapons use. It will also examine how the nuclear power industry might best be structured to procure this result and to operate in the safest possible manner.

Mr Justice Fox as Ambassador-at-large will be leading the Australian Delegation to the opening meeting in Washington on 19-20 October of the International Fuel Cycle Evaluation. Mr Justice Fox's leadership will ensure that Australia will contribute to the international fuel cycle evaluation to the maximum extent that its international position and technical expertise in nuclear matters will permit. He will also give policy advice to the Government respecting bilateral safeguards agreements and on the non-proliferation aspects of commercial contracts for the sale of uranium.

Mr Justice Fox, with his background and experience in this field - so well demonstrated by the breadth and quality of the Reports of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry - has indicated that he is prepared to accept this task, a task which is most important for Australia.

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The appointment demonstrates the tremendous concern which the Government has for problems relating to nuclear weapons proliferation and its determination to do everything possible to ensure the safest possible safeguards arrangements around the world. The Government greatly appreciates the Judge being able to make himself available for this most important international endeavour and is grateful to his Honour for accepting this appointment.

In accordance with past practice where members of the judiciary have been appointed to executive officers, for example, the appointment of Mr Justice A.E. Woodward when a Judge of the Australian Industrial Court to be Director-General of Security, Sir Owen Dixon, then a Justice of the High Court, to be Australian Minister to the United States and Sir John Latham while Chief Justice of the High Court, to be Australian Minister to Japan, the Government proposes to introduce legislation to enable Mr Justice Fox to retain his judicial status and the rights which attach to that status while Ambassador-at-large.

The Government also proposes to introduce legislation to increase the number of Judges of the A.C.T. Supreme Court from three to four to allow the Court to operate as necessary at its present strength during the period of Mr Justice Fox's appointment as Ambassador-at-large.

His Honor has advised me that particularly having regard to the administrative nature of his duties as Chief Justice and indeed the doubt that this assignment will be completed within a year he proposes to resign as Chief Justice.