



PRIME MINISTER

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STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT

Mr Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the Government has recommended to His Excellency the Governor General that the House of Representatives be dissolved on 10 November next and that a general election for the members of the House of Representatives be held on Saturday, 10 December.

His Excellency has accepted my recommendation.

Mr Speaker, the places of one half of the members of the Senate will become vacant on 30 June next. If their places are to be filled by 1 July 1978, an election to fill them must be held no later than May.

Under the second paragraph of Section 13 of the Constitution an election to fill vacant Senate places may be held within one year before the places become vacant.

Members of this House were elected on 13 December 1975; its term expires on 16 February 1979. However, Section 28 of the Constitution enables the House of Representatives to be dissolved before then. It was the general practice prior to 1963 to hold elections for the House of Representatives and for half the Senate on the same date. Indeed, in 1955, the Governor-General, Sir William Slim on the advice of the then Prime Minister dissolved the House of Representatives much earlier than its three year term to synchronise the elections for the two Houses. In that case, the election for both Houses was held some 18 months after the previous election for the House of Representatives.

In May this year, the Government put to the people a referendum proposal which was intended to ensure that elections for both Houses would have to be held simultaneously. The proposal was supported by all political parties in the Parliament and the arguments in favour of it were widely canvassed. It was approved by a significant majority - 62 percent - of all voters and by a majority of voters in three States.

It is the view of the Government that at the next election for half the Senate, an election should also be held for the House of Representatives.

This clearly accords with the view of the majority of the Australian people as reflected in the referendum vote.

Mr Speaker, it is a view shared by the Opposition.

Indeed, in a Monday Conference interview on November 1, 1976, the Leader of the Opposition thought it would be entirely appropriate to have a combined half Senate and House of Representatives election at the end of 1977. I quote the words he uttered almost exactly a year ago:

"In a year's time, which I would think would be about the earliest that there could be an election, although quite a likely time for the election, it would be a perfectly reasonable time to have a half Senate election and once could have the whole of the House of Representatives at the same time to synchronise the elections.

Mr Speaker, if the elections are not held together it will mean that there must be an election for half the Senate at least by May 1978, an election for the House of Representatives before April 1979, another election for half the Senate before July 1981 and so on - a major Federal election every one or two years.

A situation in which a Government is constantly concerned with the holding of elections is not conducive to sound Government and hence is not in the public interest.

If the elections for both Houses are to be synchronised, the question arises as to when they should be held. In practical terms, this means - should they be held in December this year, or before the end of May next year? The Government has come to the conclusion that the elections for both Houses should be held in December 1977, and I have recommended accordingly to His Excellency.

Sir, it is appropriate that I should tell the House what considerations have led the Government to this decision. At the time the Government was elected in December 1975, Australia was in a state of severe depression marked by rapid inflation, rapidly rising unemployment, and declining output. Since that election, the Government has pursued policies designed to correct the situation. These policies have required steady and resolute action. There are now encouraging signs that they are succeeding.

The economy is strengthening, there is now indisputable evidence that we are winning the fight against inflation. Interest rates are falling. Investment is rising, confidence is returning. The conditions under which real economic growth can proceed are being restored. The Government takes much satisfaction from these encouraging developments.

Nevertheless, there is still much to be done. The reduction in the rate of inflation, the achievement of real economic growth and the progressive reduction of unemployment which is a vital part of the Government's goals can only be sustained by the continuance of these policies.