



PRIME MINISTER

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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

The Prime Minister, Mr Malcolm Fraser, announced today the the Office of National Assessments would begin operations on 20 February.

The decision to create the Office of National Assessments (ONA) was announced by Mr Fraser on 5 May last year, and legislation to establish the Office was assented to on 19 October (Act No. 107 of 1977).

Mr Fraser said that the Director-General of ONA, Mr R.W. Furlonger, had taken up duty in August and had been engaged since in recruiting staff and in making other administrative preparations for ONA to begin operations.

The Prime Minister said that the decision to establish the Office of National Assessments had been very well received by those sections of the community concerned with analysing the ways in which present and future changes in Australia's external environment could affect our national security and welfare. Mr Furlonger had reported that he had been able to attract high calibre staff from a variety of authorities and intellectual disciplines, and the Government looked forward to the progressive improvement of the quality and range of assessments available to it as ONA established itself.

ONA will not itself collect intelligence by clandestine or other means, nor will it concern itself with domestic situations. It will, however, analyse intelligence and other information on international, political, strategic and economic issues of national importance to Australia. It will coordinate and reconcile the assessments of the various Commonwealth authorities on external issues, which often affect the interests of more than one Department or authority. In cases where unanimity cannot be reached, the Government expects ONA to make the best assessment it can, but also to indicate what the major dissenting judgement or judgements are.

Mr Fraser said that ONA would not be a large body, and that it would have a professional staff of about 35, consisting of officers permanently appointed to ONA as well as specialists seconded from other Departments and authorities, such as Foreign Affairs, JIO, National Development, the Reserve Bank, Trade and Resources and Treasury. ONA would avoid duplicating existing resources and data, but would involve other authorities in its work, and base its assessments on information available either inside or outside the Government.

The Government attached great importance to the close involvement of the economic Departments in the work of ONA. The Royal Commissioner on Intelligence and Security, Mr Justice Hope, had emphasised that, while politico-strategic assessments would have continuing importance, Australia, as similarly placed countries were doing, needed to do much more to develop its assessment capability in the economic and resources fields. It was clear that developments in these fields would be of increasing significance for Australia's national development and security.

The establishment of ONA represents a major step forward in implementing the recommendations of Mr Justice Hope. Mr Fraser said that he had on 25 October announced Government decisions on other recommendations made by the Royal Commissioner, and these were also now being put into effect.
