



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

9 APRIL 1978

THE MEAT INDUSTRY DISPUTE

Industrial action by two branches of the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union in Western Australia and South Australia is threatening a major market for Australia's primary producers.

A \$300 million a year trade has been established. This trade adds significantly to Australia's export income. It is important, not only for the producers of the sheep, but for all Australians. It adds to our income as a nation. It adds to our capacity to provide employment for many australians.

That market, and that income, is being threatened by two branches of one union, by people who have taken the law into their own hands, and are determined that trade shall not continue except on terms that they choose.

The Government cannot, and will not, accept circumstances in which a union, or part of a union, can dictate the terms of Australia's export trade. To do so would be to damage the standard of living of all Australians.

The cessation of this trade, through picketing which began almost three weeks ago, is particularly serious for the producers. They have been through bad seasons with low prices, and they have been suffering for many years.

This particular trade was a ray of light on the horizon. It has kept solvent many farmers who otherwise would have gone bankrupt. This industry must keep access to the live sheep market.

The Government has passed laws to protect our export trade. It will take whatever actions are necessary to maintain those laws and the trade they are designed to protect. The Government supports the legal actions that are now being taken to get the bans lifted.

Let there be no mistake. The community interest must prevail. It will prevail. That is the Government's obligation.

That must be the inevitable result. I therefore urge members of the union concerned to lift the bans and let this trade proceed forthwith.

I am certain that when that happens, the legal actions will cease. If the bans remain, legal actions must and will be pursued and supported by the Government.