



PRIME MINISTER

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Joint Statement

by

the Prime Minister and the Premier of Western Australia

A joint Commonwealth-Western Australia Report on the Ord River irrigation scheme has recommended continued Government support.

The Report compiled after a study by Sir Norman Young with the assistance of Commonwealth and State representatives calls for increased research and continuing financial support for farmers.

The Report has been submitted to the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, and the Premier of Western Australia, Sir Charles Court.

Mr Fraser and Sir Charles today welcomed the Report as an important advance in assessment of the Ord project's future.

Consideration of the findings would require continued close co-operation between the Commonwealth and State Governments and this would be undertaken.

They said the central finding of the study was that it was not possible to assess the project's long-term potential on the basis of the information presently available.

Further time was needed to determine whether the combined results of research programmes and commercial farming experience were likely to provide a basis for profitable agriculture.

There was no basis for assuming that the adverse factors which had inhibited the project's development in the past would necessarily persist in the future.

The Prime Minister and Premier said the study had found that the project should be supported by public funds for at least a further five years.

If a proper judgement was to be made about potential, it was essential that further information be gained from farming experience and the testing of research results on a commercial scale.

The difficulties encountered on the Ord to date were not due to the way in which the project had been administered. They had resulted from an inherent high cost structure and still-incomplete understanding of the area's basic agronomy.

The Prime Minister and Premier said the study had found that rice and sunflowers showed promise of being commercially successful. Budget calculations indicated that soya and mung beans had merit, although there were technical and market problems to be overcome.

It has concluded that, although there did not appear to be any prospect for immediate investment in a sugar industry at the Ord because of the current world sugar position, the Western Australian Department of Agriculture's sugar research programme should be continued to increase knowledge of agronomic, varietal and yield characteristics.

The study concluded that the primary responsibility for the project had to remain with the State Government.

It also took the view that Commonwealth funds should be provided for crop handling and processing facilities where it could be established that the facilities would be justified by an improved outlook for successful commercial farming. The Commonwealth Government was also seen to have a role in research.