



FILE 18
EMBARGO: UNTIL DELIVERY
(2 p.m.)

PRIME MINISTER

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KU-RING-GAI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL LUNCHEON

It is a pleasure for me to be here in Ku-ring-gai today and an honour for me to be present at this luncheon. Ku-ring-gai, of course, contains some of the most beautiful areas on the North Shore. And one of the finest and most popular national parks in the State, and I've no doubt that the Ku-ring-gai Council is also one of the finest and most popular councils in the State.

As you are no doubt aware, His Royal Highness Prince Charles is presently visiting Australia. His father, Prince Philip, recently recounted a story about local government which, being a farmer, I can't resist repeating. Prince Philip speaking of his visit to New Zealand with Queen Elizabeth 25 years ago said:

"It was in the days before the widespread use of milking machines. By the end of that visit I reckon we had shaken hands with every local government councillor in New Zealand.

As most of them appeared to be dairy farmers I can only say I came away with a profound sympathy for New Zealand cows."

But whatever the occupation of councillors, they always give willingly of their time to their council duties. And they certainly get plenty of recognition from their constituents whenever a flat development, or a road widening proposal is mooted.

I have always admired the unstinting work performed by councillors and I would like to speak briefly today about my Government's Federalism policy, particularly as it relates to local government and the Ku-ring-gai area. Our Federalism policy aims for co-operation between governments rather than conflict, for partnership, not domination. In recent years, there has been a dramatic change in the relationship between the Commonwealth, State and local government. The introduction by my Government of the new tax sharing arrangements in 1976 has given local government a greater degree of financial security than it ever had previously.

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The Whitlam Government had moved towards a limited funding arrangement for local government. But this was based on a compulsory grouping of councils into artificially created regions as decreed by Canberra, and a distribution of funds to them on an ad hoc basis each year.

The Liberal Party could not agree to that. Under this Government the distribution of general revenue assistance to individual councils is no longer determined in Canberra, but by State Grants Commissions.

This year, the New South Wales Grants Commission recommended the distribution of over \$65 million in tax sharing grants to local authorities in the State. As you know, the special virtue of these grants is that being untied, the purpose to which they are applied is left to each council to decide. This year the Ku-ring-gai Municipality received \$454 000, so that over the last three years the Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council has received almost \$1.3 million in untied Commonwealth funds.

Overall, assuming there is no reduction this year in the level of road grants passed on to councils by the States, and that seems a reasonable assumption, the total level of Commonwealth assistance to local government provided in the three Budgets since my Government took office is likely to be of the order of \$920 million. Of this considerable amount, the untied tax sharing grants represent nearly \$485 million. This record is one of which I and my Government are justifiably proud, and I'm sure you prefer to have the right to decide how it should be spent, rather than have the Commonwealth directing you.

At the moment, local government receives a 1.52% share of the Commonwealth's net personal income tax receipts, and it is part of our platform that we will increase the share to two percent by 1980-81.

Speaking of platforms, you may be interested to know how it is thought that term came into political use. I'm told that in one part of Ancient Greece it long was the custom that when a man proposed a law in the popular assembly he did so on a platform with a rope around his neck. If the law was passed, they removed the rope; if it failed, they removed the platform. I commend this idea to any council that wishes to limit the number of speakers in a debate.

Mr Mayor, having said that, I think I should make this speech a brief one. Thankyou once again for your warm welcome.