



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ELECTORATE TALK

Australia is about to enter an exciting decade that will see development and investment unparalleled in our country. As the world is fast beginning to realise, Australia is indeed the lucky country.

With our supplies of minerals, our vast reserves of energy -- along with the quality and calibre of our people -- we have the opportunities that are second to none.

In a world that is facing continuous problems of low growth, sluggish trade and great uncertainty following the Middle East oil crisis, it is imperative that we insulate ourselves as far as possible from these problems. We cannot afford to sit back and be totally caught up in overseas events. It is not good enough for Australia to allow itself to become the victim of a crisis far from its shores and far from its control.

As a Government we have recognised our responsibility to take initiatives to put our nation first. Over the last four years the fundamental imbalances in our economy have been largely overcome. Our inflation rate is now below that of the O.E.C.D. -- that is the advanced Western countries -- and it is well below most of our major trading partners. Costs are down. Exports are up. Our industries are more competitive than they have been for many years. With this going for us, we can enter the 1980's with greater prospects than most of the industrialised world.

We have established the economic environment which now allows private industry to undertake major development programmes that will benefit every Australian. Your Government is playing its part. A major step was taken just over a year ago in a historic meeting of the Loan Council in Melbourne which approved a new \$1.7 billion borrowing programme to finance 12 projects. That decision was a breakthrough. It was a vote of confidence in Australia.

The Premiers and the Commonwealth, meeting again in Loan Council in Canberra last Friday, endorsed that vote, with approval for a further 9 projects worth about \$800 million.

These decisions will mean that Australia's development will not be impeded because of inadequate supporting capital facilities, whether they be power plants, roads, coal loaders or ports.

The major portion of last Friday's approvals -- almost \$500 million worth -- covered electricity generation projects in N.S.W., Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. Basic resource development accounted for the remainder.

The meeting was a fine example of how the Commonwealth and the States, working in tandem, can take decisions of vital importance for this nation as we move into the 1980's and beyond.

Energy, of course, is a key area of Government responsibility. As we move into the new decade and into a great new national development programme, the management of our vast energy reserves is an integral part of that development. The appointment of Senator Carrick - a very senior Minister - as head of the new Department of National Development and Energy, underlines our resolve to make the best possible use of our nation's resources.

The availability and pricing of energy are at the core of the effective functioning of our economy and indeed, the world economy. The development of our energy resources, in partnership with State Governments and industry, works hand in hand with private sector investment, growth of industry and employment, trade policy, transport policy and foreign policy.

We appreciate the need to strengthen our industrial base and encourage to its greatest extent the processing of Australian minerals by Australians. This year's programme of developmental projects will expedite the development of energy reserves which are alternatives to liquid fuels.

The new programme will provide an unprecedented coal-fired power base for mining and manufacturing investment in Australia, including the domestic processing of our own raw materials.

Australia is partly dependent on imported crude oil. But with prudent and imaginative policies our abundance of other energy reserves should be a growing source of wealth and prosperity in the years ahead.

Of course, these great national development programmes will not be realised without an able work-force. The working men and women of Australia are equal to that task. The development programmes initiated by Loan Council last Friday will provide many thousands of new jobs. In the operational stages, in the construction stage, in supporting industries, and in the service sector, they will be the kind of jobs that Australians want. They will not be stop-gap jobs. The work opportunities that will be provided will be rewarding and long-lasting. They will be private sector jobs based on Australia's rich resources.

In economic terms, it boils down to this: "The last four years have seen steady and sustainable growth in our international competitiveness and in our attraction of overseas investment". These are the criteria for employment growth. With our policies and our programmes, Australia will continue to grow and to prosper.