



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

MONDAY, APRIL 19 1982

RESIGNATION OF MINISTERS

With regret I have accepted the resignations of Mr MacKellar as Minister for Health and Mr Moore as Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs. Both Ministers tendered their resignations in view of questions that have arisen about their actions in respect of customs procedures and having regard to their acceptance of responsibility for those actions.

Mr MacKellar assures me, and I accept, that in bringing a colour television set through Customs last October, he had no intention either to mislead Customs or to evade duty. He has quite properly accepted responsibility for the incorrect declaration that was completed in his name.

The outcome however was that duty was not paid at the time - although subsequently it will be paid - and the Minister therefore appears to be in a preferred position compared with other Australians - something that Ministerial instructions issued in 1976 sought specifically to avoid.

Mr Moore very properly followed-up the question of the incorrectly completed customs declaration form, but not to the extent of establishing whether the item brought in by Mr MacKellar was dutiable or not.

Mr Moore has assured me, and I accept, that his error in not following up this question was an error honestly made.

This Government has always upheld the fundamental principles of Ministerial responsibility, and that the appearance and reality of integrity are indispensable parts of our system of government. I have insisted, and our Party expects, that responsibility should be maintained. It is extremely regrettable that these instances have come into the path of otherwise outstanding performances by these two Ministers.

The penalties in public office are high. Both Ministers accept this and have accordingly volunteered their resignations.

It is my intention to recommend to His Excellency, the Governor-General, that the resignations be accepted. I shall recommend to His Excellency that, for the time being, the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs, Mr Brown, be sworn as Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Baume, be sworn as Minister for Health, until such time as permanent arrangements are made. The appointments will be in addition to their present portfolios.

This matter will of course be referred to in Parliament tomorrow. Relevant papers will be available to be tabled.

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