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## PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

TUESDAY, 11 MAY 1982

### CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

I have written today to all State Premiers and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory seeking their views on the desirability of holding another session of the Australian Constitutional Convention. If States and the Northern Territory support the holding of another session, timing would be discussed at the June Premiers' Conference.

The Constitutional Convention consists of representatives from the Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Parliaments as well as from local government and the Australian Capital Territory. It has met in four plenary sessions: 1973 (Sydney), 1975 (Melbourne), 1976 (Hobart) and 1978 (Perth). At the last session, it was agreed to hold the next session in Adelaide at a time to be determined after the views of the Premiers' Conference had been obtained.

The Constitution has served Australia well. It has proved capable of being adapted to suit changing social, political and international circumstances. It is, however, accepted by all political parties that there are areas where some change is desirable. The Convention provides the opportunity for representatives of the three tiers of Government and from the major political parties to consider such areas and to make recommendations for change where appropriate.

While the Australian electorate has traditionally been cautious about constitutional change, experience in 1977 would indicate that where there is a wide measure of agreement between the Commonwealth and the States, and across the political spectrum, the prospects of amendments being carried are good, especially where proposals have been thoroughly considered and endorsed by the Convention. Each of the 1977 referendum questions arose substantially from the deliberations of the early sessions of the Convention.

A successful meeting of the Convention requires a spirit of co-operation from all sides based on agreement that there are available substantial proposals sufficiently well developed for meaningful discussion. Since the last Plenary Session, a Standing Committee, chaired by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, has been examining a number of questions such as the Senate and Supply and the term of the Parliament. The Committee is now in a position to report on some matters and others are substantially developed.

The Commonwealth's action in raising the question of a further session at this time reflects its commitment to the Convention as a continuing forum for the consideration of possible changes to the Constitution.