



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ELECTORATE TALK

The legislation for a National Crimes Commission which was introduced into Parliament last week will establish an effective agency designed specifically to combat organised crime and corruption in Australia. At the same time, the legislation provides a basis for effective co-operation with the states, and with police forces and other law enforcement agencies.

It has become clear in recent years that organised crime, and criminal activities relating to drugs and other matters, have got beyond the reach of our traditional law enforcement methods and agencies. The Williams and Stewart Royal Commissions on Drugs and Drug Trafficking, a number of joint Commonwealth-state police task force reports, and most recently the Costigan Royal Commission's Interim Report, all tell vastly disturbing stories about the spread and significance of organised crime in Australia. Mr Costigan's investigations into the Painters and Dockers Union have highlighted that Australia is not immune from the kind of criminal activities which most of us would have associated perhaps with Chicago or other countries, but not Australia.

Some quotations from the Costigan Report starkly illustrate the seriousness of the situation. Mr Costigan says, "I am satisfied that the Union, at least in Victoria, Newcastle, Queensland and South Australia if not in Sydney as well, is an organised criminal group following criminal pursuits. At least in Victoria those in charge of the Union recruit exclusively those who have serious criminal convictions." (Para.10.02 of Mr Costigan's edited Chapter 10 of Vol. 2, 4th Interim Report.) Mr Costigan also says in relation to the kind of activity he has unearthed, "The type of criminal activity is of a substantial kind. It involves large scale and continuing fraud, or large and continuous importation of drugs at great cost, continuing illegal gambling schemes or other forms of widespread criminal activity." (Para. 10.09)

It is imperative to attack these problems urgently and effectively, to prevent any further entrenchment of this kind of crime in Australia, and do everything possible to eradicate it. That is why the Government is pressing ahead with legislation at this time. It is not good enough to go on as we have been doing in spite of everything we know and in spite of all the talk

about the need to act. The Crimes Commission will co-operate with traditional law enforcement agencies. It will in no sense replace them and its activities will be essentially directed towards types of crime which those agencies have experienced special difficulties in investigating.

I very much hope the states will keep an open mind and adopt a co-operative stand in relation to the Commission because the problems clearly straddle state boundaries, they affect both Commonwealth and state legal jurisdictions. The Crimes Commission will be operating in the areas of Commonwealth law, it in no way infringes on state sovereignty or state rights. But at the same time, if any or all of the states want to make use of the Commission, then the Commission will be empowered by our legislation to accept particular commissions from the states, and to accept jurisdiction for areas of state law which states may wish to confer on the Commission. This is entirely up to the states to determine, but the way is open, and there is every reason why the Commonwealth/state co-operation which has existed with Royal Commissions, joint task forces, and the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, should run into the new Crimes Commission.

The Crimes Commission will be far more appropriate than Royal Commissions to deal with organised crime. Mr Costigan has emphasised the importance of a prosecuting arm to attend to prosecutions immediately they arise during investigations such as his. The Crimes Commission, while able to give information to the police, will also have its own responsibility to develop cases for prosecution. In serious and complex cases especially, it is intended that the Commission will work hand in hand with the legal counsel who will prosecute if a case for prosecution is found.

To make sure the Commission can deal with whatever forms of organised crime it uncovers, the Commission will have a broad charter, giving it scope to look into complaints or follow up its own investigations, and it will have the powers needed to come to grips with organised crime. The legislation has been framed in a way that will make the Commission effective, while also meeting the legitimate concerns which have been expressed about the idea of a National Crimes Commission.

I am confident that the Crimes Commission will make a major contribution in dealing with organised crime. It is a vital Government initiative and I am confident it will receive the widespread support it deserves.