



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

25 July 1983

The Prime Minister today chaired the first meeting of the Economic Planning Advisory Council.

EPAC has been set up to continue the process of co-operation which was begun at the Summit.

Today's inaugural meeting continued that spirit of constructive co-operation.

The purpose of EPAC is to provide independent community-based advice to the Government on the broad conduct of economic policy, particularly in a medium and longer-term context.

The membership of the Council is drawn from Commonwealth and State Governments, industry, the union movement, local government, consumer and welfare organisations.

The preparation of the 1983-4 Budget is nearing completion and therefore non-Federal Government members of EPAC have had no involvement in or responsibility whatsoever for what will be in that Budget.

Nevertheless, the Federal Government was assisted by observations from those non-Federal Government members in what they regarded as relevant appropriate considerations to be taken into account in reaching decisions about the Budget.

The Council discussed developments in prices and incomes matters, including the Government's intention to introduce legislation establishing a Prices Surveillance Authority early in the forthcoming Budget Sitzings of Parliament.

The Prime Minister sought the reaction of Council members to the appointment of an additional member to EPAC through consultation with the relevant small business organisation, the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia.

It was felt that a member with special knowledge and experience of the problems faced by small businesses would be able to make a particularly valuable contribution to the Council's work.

Legislation to amend the EPAC Act for this purpose will be introduced in the Budget Sitzings.

The Council considered the future areas of work to be undertaken related to its predominant role in considering the optimum future patterns of economic development in Australia.

The structure of the Council's work program to give effect to this fundamentally important task will be examined in detail at the next meeting.

By this time an appointment will have been made to the position of Director of the EPAC Secretariat.

However, it was thought to be useful immediately to commission work on some areas which will inevitably be relevant to the Council's broad responsibilities however they develop.

These areas are:

- * updating and further development of the "Summit" scenarios,
- * analysis of existing Federal Government mechanisms concerned with issues relevant to economic development,
- * analysis of the existing data base,
- * a summary of the major findings of previous studies (e.g. the Asprey Report) dealing with the revenue base, and
- * an examination of the likely employment growth and workforce participation in the process of the anticipated economic recovery.

The appointment of a Director to head the planned independent Secretariat is expected to be made over the next month and the recruitment of other staff will follow.

In the meantime, the Council will be assisted by a small number of staff seconded from Commonwealth Government Departments.