



PRIME MINISTER

ADVICE TO MEDIA

8 OCTOBER 1984

The attached speech was read on Mr Hawke's behalf by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Bowen.



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL 4.00 P.M.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech by the Prime Minister
Opening of the Annual Federal Council Meeting
of the Federal Municipal and Shire Council
Employees' Union of Australia - Canberra - 8 October 1984

Mr President, delegates of the Federal Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union of Australia.

May I say how pleased I am to be here this afternoon to open your Annual Federal Council Meeting.

Three years ago, I had the pleasure of addressing some of you at the 22nd World Congress of the Public Services International in Singapore where, as one of the keynote speakers and as shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, Employment and Youth Affairs, I spoke about the public servant in a changing world.

I emphasised the immense importance of the public sector and of public sector workers in the modern economy - I attempted to rebut what I saw to be the systematic, sustained and widespread attacks being carried out by governments at the time, including in Australia, on the role of the public sector in the national economy and the status of their own employees in that sector.

Much has happened in the short time since the Singapore Congress. My fellow keynote speaker, Olaf Palme, has again become Prime Minister of Sweden, while in Australia the Australian Labor Party won Government both at the national level and in a majority of States.

This has given us the opportunity to implement the public sector reforms we consider necessary. It has also enabled us to promote a more positive attitude on the part of governments towards the role of the public sector and to recognise the important contribution of public servants in the delivery of public goods at all levels.

One of the Australian Labor Government's priorities has been to raise the status and strengthen the capacity of local government in Australia. Our aim is to achieve a meaningful partnership of Commonwealth, State and local governments, co-operating in a broad range of functions, to build a vigorous Australian community and economy from the grass roots up.

This implies a quite radical change in intergovernmental relations. It is an exciting challenge and one to which, I am sure, all in local government will eagerly respond.

Changes will not be made overnight but over time, following careful examination and the closest consultation between all concerned.

To assist in laying the foundation for change, the Government announced in May this year a National Inquiry into Local Government Financing with a view to developing a more stable, efficient, and equitable system of resourcing local government's expanding functions. The Inquiry, under the chairmanship of Professor Peter Self - an internationally renowned expert in public administration - is currently calling for submissions; I understand the MEU is intending to respond.

We have also now received the report of the Advisory Council for Inter-government Relations concerning the responsibilities and resources of Australian local government.

This report, recently tabled in the National Parliament, is probably one of the most far reaching examinations ever undertaken of local government responsibilities and of the resources available to local authorities to meet those responsibilities.

It will not only provide a direct input to the process of developing a stronger role for local government in our national government system, but will also be useful to the Financing Inquiry.

As my colleague, the Minister for Territories and Local Government, Tom Uren, has already indicated, the Government will be examining the report, its conclusions and recommendations, in a thorough and comprehensive way.

Both the Advisory Council for Inter-government Relations report and the Financing Inquiry report, when received, will provide a firm and valuable base on which to establish policies and programs designed to improve local government's capacity to meet the major community problems and social issues facing us today.

Another major step has been preparation of a report by a sub-committee of the Australian Constitutional Convention concerning the possible recognition of local government in our Constitution. The report will be given careful consideration at the next session of the Convention, which is due to meet in Brisbane in 1985.

Taken together, these developments provide the best basis there has ever been for a vigorous, well informed community discussion of the problems and possibilities of local government.

Out of such discussion constructive proposals should emerge for future reform in the character, role and responsibility of local government in Australia.

During its first 18 months in office the Government has given particular priority to improving the co-ordination of Commonwealth activities affecting local government and to improving relations and consultative mechanisms between the three spheres of Government.

Last year we established the first Ministry for Local Government and appointed one of our most experienced Ministers to lead it.

In recognition of the contribution local government can make to the national economic policy consultative and advisory process, we have also ensured local government is represented on the Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC).

Steps have also been taken to directly involve local government in major programs of national interest. For example, we have invited local government to participate frankly and constructively in the development of new federal road funding arrangements.

We have also made it easier for local government and community organisations to sponsor projects under the Community Employment Program (CEP).

The CEP offers opportunities for a very significant role for local government. Through it local government can move beyond a simple agency function towards a more active involvement in the development of employment opportunities and expanded employment and economic promotion activities.

The challenge to local government is to ensure that it is adequately equipped to contribute effectively to such programs. The Commonwealth Government will do what it can to assist, but ultimately the responsibility lies with local government itself to take necessary action and to demonstrate its capabilities.

Despite severe economic restraint this financial year, the August Budget provided for increased levels of assistance to local government so that progress can continue towards raising its status and capacity.

In 1984/85, consistent with our commitment to maintain the real value of general revenue assistance, we have provided local government authorities in the States with almost \$487 million, an increase of \$27 million or 5.9 per cent on the 1983/84 allocation. Commonwealth assistance for local roads under the Road Grants Act will increase by 6 per cent to \$195 million, while, under the Community Employment Program, \$269 million has been allocated for expenditure on the State Government/local government/community group component of the program.

Funds in 1984/85 to the Territories and Local Government portfolio have been also significantly increased to further the Department's co-ordination role for local government matters at the Commonwealth level.

This year we also set aside \$5 million for a Local Government Development Program. The program will consist of activities in the fields of regional community development, information assistance, research, staff training and development and innovation.

The amount allocated for this purpose represents a significant increase on the previous year. The extent of the increase in difficult budgetary circumstances reflects the Government's commitment to strengthening, in co-operation with the States, the role of local government in the Australian community.

It is proposed that some \$3.8 million of this \$5 million allocation will go to assisting community development in agreed areas. A significant proportion will be set aside for three regions in which the program was piloted in 1983/84 - West and North-West Melbourne and West Sydney. The remainder of the \$3.8 million will be allocated between the States following discussions with each State aimed at identifying regions requiring assistance.

Monies are also to be allocated in 1984/85 under the Local Government Development Program for such purposes as staff interchange, design of new local government related training courses, and new forms of assistance to individuals to undertake courses, with emphasis on courses for middle management and blue collar areas.

Besides training, one of the cornerstones to attaining improvement in local government services and facilities is innovation. The 1984/85 Budget provides for awards to be made as an encouragement to those who make outstanding contributions to improve local government services and facilities.

Funds have also been increased to the National Industry Training Committee in which your union plays such a major role.

Significant activities of the Industry Training Committee include the analysis of training needs, the development of programs to meet those needs and increasing liaison with education institutions.

It is extremely encouraging to note the responsible part played by unions, and particularly the MEU, in the operations of the Industry Training Committee. The network of industry training committees in almost all States provides a unique and valuable forum for discussion between Government, employers and unions on the training needs and related problems of employees at all levels.

Such co-operation is vital if, as individuals or communities, we are to realise our aspirations for a better Australia.

Most importantly local government is charged with addressing and delivering on the basic requirements of day to day life in a modern society.

The Federal Labor Government's program for building a better Australia requires of local governments an effective and constructive exercise of their responsibilities.

You have a crucial role to play.

I know you are fully capable of the task.

I have every confidence in your continuing commitment, and, knowing this, I am sure all Australians will continue to benefit greatly from the workings of dedicated and effective local governments.
