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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

10 February 1986

Federal Cabinet today agreed on action to assist the people of Queensland affected by Cyclone Winifred which devastated large areas of the North Queensland coastline a week ago.

The Government received today a report from the Minister for Primary Industry, Mr Kerin, on his inspection of the damage arising from Cyclone Winifred and on his discussions with local Government officials, cane and banana growers and community groups.

Cabinet also had available a report on discussions held last Friday between Commonwealth and Queensland officers which considered the particular circumstances of the cyclone damaged area.

The officials discussed the arrangements that might be put in place, and in particular discussed the operation of the Commonwealth/State Natural Disasters Relief Arrangements.

At this stage the full impact and extent of damage and hardship is not available to either the Queensland or the Federal Government and it has been agreed that further consultations will be held when more information comes to hand.

Under the new Natural Disaster Arrangements introduced on 1 July 1985, and agreed to by the States, Queensland meets the first \$10.48 million of expenditure in 1985/86. Since the Queensland Government has already spent more than this amount on natural disaster relief this year, further payments will be shared equally by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments for the next \$7.86 million of assistance. Thereafter the Commonwealth will fund three quarters of additional expenditure. In the circumstances it is expected that the Commonwealth will be meeting at least 50 per cent of the total disaster relief assistance in Queensland during 1985/86.

In addition to this the Government has agreed that funds will also be provided to various local Councils through the Commonwealth element of the Community Employment Program for a Cyclone Winifred Special Area Rehabilitation Project. The Project, to be sponsored by the Minister for Local Government and Administrative Services will aim to assist in the restoration and improvement of public parks and gardens, and at the same time, provide employment opportunities for the long term unemployed and other disadvantaged job seekers in the area.

To provide practical help to the two Shire most severely affected, Johnstone and Cardwell Shires, we have arranged under my Government's Local Government Development Program for Mr Duncan Beggs, the City Engineer from Darwin, to be available for several weeks at Commonwealth expense to help organise clean up and reconstruction work. He was responsible for rehabilitation in the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy, and provided expert assistance after Cyclones Gretel and Max in Northern Australia and the Macedon bushfires in Victoria. As well as providing immediate assistance in the Shires, the visiting expert will advise on longer term strategies.

The Prime Minister also commended the establishment of a national appeal for victims of Cyclone Winifred and said that under the income tax law donations of over \$2.00 to a public fund for the relief of cyclone victims in need, would be an eligible tax deduction.