



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

18 MARCH 1986

The Government is acutely aware of the importance to Australia of the rural sector. It is the base upon which the rest of Australia's economy has historically been built. It is among the most efficient and, conversely, one of the least protected agricultural sectors in the world. Australia has an outstanding record as an agricultural producer and exporter, and as a supplier of food to the world.

The health of our rural sector is of great concern to this Government at any time. Given various conditions and influences operating in international markets at the moment, our rural sector's problems are very much at the forefront of our current concerns.

I point out these facts to underscore the importance which I place on my forthcoming overseas visit, which will now include several European capitals after my visit to Washington.

It should be understood clearly that any action or influence which tends to damage or threatens to damage international agricultural markets and, more specifically, the access of Australian producers to those markets, will prompt reaction from this Government.

My visit should be seen as much for its significance in recognising the rural sector's importance to us as much as for the opportunity it gives me to reinforce at first hand our views on the damage done by market distortions to Australian producers.

Following my visit to Washington from 16-18 April, I shall be visiting London, Brussels, Rome and Athens between 19 and 26 April.

As announced at the National Press Club recently, during my visit to Washington I will have talks with President Reagan and senior members of his Administration about Australia's increasing concern over the outlook for the international trading system particularly with regard to agricultural trade. I shall also hold parallel discussions with senior members of the United States Congress on these issues.

Two major objectives of my visit will be to discuss ways of minimising the negative impact that the Export Enhancement Program and other aspects of the US Farm Bill could have on Australia's rural sector, and to discuss how best to promote a more rational international trading system for agricultural products with particular reference to the forthcoming Tokyo Economic Summit.

While in Washington, I also expect to exchange views with senior members of the US Administration on international political issues of common concern, as well as international economic subjects apart from trade.

My visit will also provide opportunities to reinforce in Europe Australia's increasing concern about the outlook for international agricultural trade and the need to address this issue at the forthcoming Tokyo Economic Summit. As part of these discussions, I will be expressing Australia's continuing concern about the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy and the importance we attach to its reform.

In Brussels, I shall take the opportunity to reinforce our concerns about the outlook for the international trading system particularly for agricultural trade, with senior members of the Commission of the European Communities led by its President, Mr Delors.

My meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher in London will provide an opportunity not only to discuss current problems in agricultural trade, but also to review the long-standing and close bilateral ties between Australia and Britain, and to exchange views on international political issues apart from trade.

During my stay in Rome, I shall have a private audience with His Holiness, the Pope, which will provide an opportunity to discuss with him a range of issues, including his visit to Australia in November.

In Rome and Athens, I expect to discuss international political and economic issues of common interest with Prime Ministers Craxi and Papandreou. Australia's relations with both Italy and Greece have been greatly strengthened by flows of migration and other people-to-people contacts in recent decades. I look forward to reviewing Australia's close and warm bilateral relationship with each country and exploring the scope for future development.

In Rome, I also expect to sign the reciprocal agreement on portability of pensions.