



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

19 March 1986

I have formed a special Country Task Force to monitor the social, economic and political requirements of Australians living outside the metropolitan area.

The Task Force's brief is to listen, assess and report directly to me on issues of importance to country people, largely through visits to particular country areas. The first visit will be to Warwick in the southern Darling Downs area, on 25-26 March.

The Task Force will also concentrate on areas outside the State capitals where rapid change is occurring with significant effects on people's lives.

The Task Force is based on the Government Caucus Primary Industry Committee. It is to be chaired by the Member for Macmillan, Barry Cunningham, who also chairs the Caucus committee.

The Task Force will deal with all rural and socio-economic issues, including small business, women's affairs, care for the elderly, job generation and primary production. It will be directed as much to people living in provincial towns and cities as to the farm sector.

The initial visit to the southern Darling Downs will be followed by visits to the south west of Western Australia in April and to central Victoria in June. Other visits will be made later in the year and throughout 1987.

The establishment of the Prime Minister's Country Task Force is the result of almost 12 months preliminary work.

This includes meetings with the Caucus Primary Industry Committee and the Minister for Primary Industry, John Kerin, who fully supports the program.

The establishment of this Task Force reflects the fact that almost 25 per cent of Government parliamentarians directly represent country people. This makes the Australian Labor Party the parliament's strongest party representing country people.

The Task Force will meet with a wide range of community groups, listen to their points of view before then reporting to me on issues of concern. This will allow us to be as fully informed as possible.

Our objective is to provide long term, lasting solutions to problems confronting country people rather than short-term 'band-aid' measures.

The Task Force will also provide an opportunity to explain Government measures which may affect country Australians.