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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

2 MAY 1986

I received an urgent message last night, 1 May, from the Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Mr Paias Wingti, seeking assistance from the Australian Government in the provision of a Hercules aircraft to transport urgently needed chemicals, protective clothing and equipment for the treatment of coffee fungus rot which has been identified in the Baiyer River area of the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The disease is threatening the \$300m a year coffee industry, a most important element in the PNG economy.

The Minister for Defence has approved the availability of a C130 Hercules for this purpose. The aircraft is on standby at RAAF Richmond Air Base and will depart for Papua New Guinea as soon as the chemicals and materials identified by PNG authorities have been procured. It is hoped the aircraft will depart this afternoon direct to Mount Hagen.

The Natural Disasters Organisation has responded quickly in co-ordinating assistance required to meet this request from the PNG Government.

I am pleased that the Government is able to assist the PNG Government in their efforts to eradicate the coffee rust disease. I have conveyed to Mr Wingti my personal wishes for the PNG Government's early success in eradicating the disease.