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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE MINISTER FOR THE ARTS, SPORT, THE ENVIRONMENT, TOURISM AND TERRITORIES, SENATOR GRAHAM RICHARDSON

Australia is to sign an international treaty aimed at protecting the ozone layer.

Australia will sign this week the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, one of a series of actions which the Commonwealth is taking to protect the ozone layer.

Action to protect the ozone layer is high on the environmental agenda of the Commonwealth Government. We are confronted by an environmental problem with global implications and firm measures must be taken now.

Senator Richardson will shortly be putting to Cabinet a proposal for legislation to control ozone depleting chemicals. It is intended that this legislation, which would implement the provisions of the Montreal Protocol, will be passed later this year. However, Australia should not necessarily confine action to meeting the particular requirements of the Montreal Protocol. These should be regarded as the minimum. All practicable steps should be taken to reduce emissions of ozone depleting substances.

The ozone layer in the upper atmosphere screens out most of the harmful ultraviolet light from the sun. This radiation causes skin cancers and other health problems. Also it can damage plants, including farm crops, and aquatic life.

Emissions into the air of some man-made chemicals, mainly chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), damage the ozone layer. CFCs are used in some aerosol sprays, in refrigeration and air conditioning units, and in the production of some plastic foams.

Under the Protocol, Australia will be required to freeze the consumption of CFCs at 1986 levels, beginning from next year, and to progressively cut their use by half over the next ten years.

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The Government is concerned by recent scientific discoveries of dramatic losses of ozone over Antarctica for part of the year, with CFCs being an important cause of the so-called ozone hole. In addition, measurements of ozone over the rest of the globe are now indicating small ozone losses caused by CFCs.

Australia will press to ensure that the provisions of the Montreal Protocol are revised as necessary in the light of the most up-to-date scientific findings. All countries must act together in a positive way to ensure that the ozone layer is protected. The first review of the Protocol will be completed by 1990.

The Commonwealth will continue to work closely with State Governments and industry in ensuring the progress of the proposed national legislation on protection of the ozone layer.

We look forward to the cooperation of other political parties when the legislation is introduced into the Parliament.