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PRIME MINISTER 29/3

25/9

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON PJ KEATING MP
ERRORS IN THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD**

The Federal Government has no plans to introduce a permanent honour guard to officiate at ceremonial welcomes and no such plan has been considered by me.

The story in today's Sydney Morning Herald suggesting that I asked the Defence Department to consider forming such a permanent honour guard is riddled with errors and omits a specific denial issued by my office last night.

My office told the newspaper such a guard would be "out of the question" due to the high cost of establishing such a unit.

I understand that the newspaper made no effort to contact Senator Ray or his office about the story.

I have not suggested to the Department of Defence that it consider forming a "permanent honour guard" for visiting dignitaries.

Last year I asked PM&C officials to look at the question of welcoming ceremonies to see if their form was still relevant to contemporary Australia.

As a result, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet had some official level discussions, including with the Department of Defence, about these matters.

The Defence Department advised PM&C officials that the ADF is finding it increasingly difficult to meet the traditional requirements for honour guards to greet high-level civilian and military visitors as growing numbers of uniformed defence personnel are now located out of Canberra.

Defence advised that one option to meet this need would be the formation of a permanent ceremonial guard unit, but that this would be costly.

This Defence proposal was not taken up by my Department and I was not made aware of it.

I have not been "highly impressed" with "French ceremonial welcomes" because I have never had a French ceremonial welcome. I have not made a state visit to France.

No RAAF VIP fleet Boeing 707 has "had a \$14 million refit", nor is any \$14 million refit underway. The newspaper did not ask my office about this matter. I have in fact specifically ruled out the construction of a permanent VIP suite in the aircraft.

The only work currently being looked at is on noise mitigation for the VIP fleet.

CANBERRA

29 March 1995