



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

FRENCH NUCLEAR POLICY

The Government welcomes the indication that France may be willing to sign a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which imposes a zero threshold on testing, and to close the Mururoa testing site.

The suggestions were made by a French Foreign Affairs official in a debate with the Australian Ambassador to Washington, Dr Russell, over night. If this position is confirmed at a meeting of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva later today, it would represent an important step forward by France.

As I said in my statement in the House of Representatives on 19 June and more recently on Hiroshima Day, 6 August, an international agreement to a binding and genuinely comprehensive CTBT no later than 1996 is a central policy aim of the Australian Government. Such an agreement would be a major boost to international security and to our goal of the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

In the meantime, the Government will continue to work in international forums, and with other members of the growing international coalition against nuclear testing, to persuade the Government and people of France of the serious consequences of the decision to resume testing at Mururoa.

We will shortly be in a position to announce the arrangements for the parliamentary delegation, led by the Minister for Pacific Island Affairs, Mr Bilney, which is to visit Europe. We are also continuing to work with our partners in the South Pacific Forum. A special meeting of South Pacific Environment Ministers will be held in Brisbane next week to discuss this issue.

The Government has received representations for assistance from the organisers of a protest vessel to carry Australian and international parliamentarians to Mururoa. In the light of their advice that without additional funds for a deposit a suitable vessel could not be chartered, the Government is prepared to make a contribution of \$200,000 towards this public protest.

The Government's contribution will be subject to a number of conditions, including that the vessel does not breach the French exclusion zone around Mururoa or other international law, and that a majority of the total costs involved come from private participants and supporters. The charter will remain a purely private operation.

For reasons I have outlined in the past, the Government will not itself be sending a naval or other government-operated vessel to participate in the protest.

CANBERRA
10 August 1995