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PRIME MINISTER

FUNDING OF GUN 'BUY BACK' SCHEME

I am writing to all Premiers and Chief Ministers to inform them that the Commonwealth Government is prepared to fund all of the direct cost of the gun 'buy back' scheme agreed to by the Commonwealth and the States at last Friday's meeting of Police Ministers.

The funds will be raised by a one-off increase in the Medicare levy from 1.5% to 1.7% for the income year 1996-97. The funds raised - estimated at approximately \$500 million - will be devoted solely to the purpose of funding compensation for surrendered guns, with any surplus returned via the Medicare levy system.

This represents approximately \$70 or \$1.40 a week for a person on average weekly earnings.

This whole scheme is designed to reduce the number of guns in the community and make Australia a safer place to live. I believe that Australians are prepared to make this sacrifice, in the wake of the tragic events at Port Arthur.

Providing the necessary incentives to remove rapid fire weapons from our community underpins the urgent and comprehensive action on gun control which all governments have been prepared to undertake.

The Commonwealth funds will be for the fair and proper compensation of gun owners who surrender those firearms agreed by Police Ministers to be subject to nation-wide prohibition, ie self-loading rifles, self-loading shotguns and pump action shotguns. The States and Territories will be asked to meet the cost of administering the 'buy back' scheme.

The Commonwealth recognises the importance of conducting a public education campaign in conjunction with the amnesty and compensation scheme, and of developing an appropriate firearms safety course, and will contribute to the cost of both programs.

I urge all Australians who own these guns to take advantage of the amnesty and compensation arrangements, when available.

The Commonwealth Government has also taken action to ban the importation of the guns to be subject to nation-wide prohibition.

14 May 1996