The active period of Cabinet meetings since Parliament went into recess last year is now making itself felt in the current Parliamentary session. Minister for Defence and Member for Wannon, Mr. Malcolm Fraser, said this today.

Something of a record had been established in the volume of legislation prepared by the regular and long meetings of the Cabinet, said Mr. Fraser. Members and Senators were extremely busy analysing the new measures which are being introduced into Parliament in a heavy legislative programme. These decisions, affecting a wide range of issues, were outlined in the Governor-General's opening speech.

The Government decided to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – on the express understanding that Australia was not automatically committed to ratification.

The Treaty was not binding until it was ratified, and before it was ratified the Australian Government would want to have a number of assurances about the Treaty.

The Government wanted a Treaty that was going to be effective, and it did not believe that as yet sufficient nations had signed or ratified the Treaty to render it fully effective.

However, Japan and West Germany recently signed, and this had added to prospects for a more effective Treaty. But Japan and West Germany too, had signed with reservations.

Late last month a step forward was taken in Commonwealth/State relationships. The Commonwealth agreed in principle that there was a need for a more rapid growth each year in State revenue grants, and this will be discussed with the States.

The Commonwealth suggested it should gradually assume full responsibility for a proportion of State debt – perhaps to the extent of $1,000 million and to provide interest free grants for a part of state works.

The Prime Minister had announced a special revenue grant of $12 million for the States, $3 million of it for Victoria.

Last year the Government embarked on the most intensive social welfare programme in Australia's history.

During the current session of Parliament the Minister for Health introduced the new health benefits plan designed to minimise the gap between cost of health services to the patient and the total refund available.

The Government would introduce a bill in Parliament to implement the decision to set up an Industry Development Corporation, which was designed to help bring about greater Australian participation in development of our resources, Mr. Fraser said.

The Corporation would be able to tap sources of overseas funds which Australian companies generally had not been able to utilise. The purpose is to enable Australian companies to keep a larger part of ownership of major undertakings in their own hands. Under present circumstances, if companies
need to attract funds from overseas they can often do so only by selling a significant interest in the company. It is hoped that the Corporation will enable Australian companies to maintain a larger share of the ownership of developmental projects.

The legislative programme also included proposals to advance Papua and New Guinea further along the road to self-government and eventual independence.

Ministerial members were to be given full, instead of shared authority, for their departments, and other changes would be made to give elected members a greater say in the actual drafting of the Territory budget.

Mr. Fraser said business in the Parliamentary recess also included the agreement reached by the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia for construction of the Dartmouth Dam, which would permit additional storage of about three million acre feet.

The Government would over the next five years provide $100 million for new proposals under the National Water Resources Development Programme. This covered proposals for flood prevention and flood mitigation works.

Another proposal would assist those seeking their own home. The plan would liberalise eligibility for the Government's home savings grant. Permissible limit on the value of a house would be raised by $2,000 to $17,500 and savings in credit unions approved would qualify as savings to attract the grant.

Proposals affecting primary producers were outlined — these included plans to halve the present levy on woolgrowers for research and promotion and double the Government's contribution to a maximum annual level of $27 million; the furthering of efforts to expand our meat markets abroad; the wool marketing proposals; a decision that CSIRO and the Australian Wheat Board collaborate in setting up and operating a laboratory to conduct research into grain storage problems.
Author/s: Fraser, Malcolm

Title: Heavy legislative programme for Parliament

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File Description: Heavy legislative programme for Parliament

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