COMMENTS ON OPPOSITION TO PORTLAND WOOL SALES

I don't think any of the people who have been trying to arrange or support the opening of Portland as a wool selling centre thought that the project would be an easy one.

For quite some time I have been aware of the strong possibility that the brokers and the buyers would do everything they could to prevent the sales being a success, and only in this last week I received a letter from the Manager of Portland Woolbrokers, together with a copy of a letter written by the Chairman of the National Council of Woolselling Brokers.

This letter from the Chairman of the National Council made it quite plain that the brokers would oppose sales at Portland despite the wishes of a large number of growers in Western Victoria. This letter was also the final refusal of the Portland Wool Brokers' request to be allotted sale dates within the orderly arrangement of sales throughout Australia. This means, of course, that Portland Wool Brokers have to set their own dates, avoiding as far as possible conflict with other major sales. This decision by the Brokers does not mean that sales cannot be held, it only means that the brokers are opposing sales at Portland.

The Australian Council of Woolbuyers are also opposing wool sales at Portland, although they have not gone to the length that they did in New South Wales where they tried to prohibit their individual members attending sales at Goulburn.

One paragraph in a letter I have seen from the Chairman of the National Council of Woolbuyers is quite extraordinary. The paragraph I am referring to reads like this:-

"The responsibility and perogative as it affects the opening of new markets on behalf of the Australian wool buying Trade is entirely the concern of the Australian Council of Woolbuyers."

This is a fantastic claim, implying that only the buyers' interests are to be served, and ignoring completely the wishes of many growers. It is a position that cannot be let stand as it is.

It is my belief that this opposition on behalf of brokers and buyers, which has now come to light, will do much to strengthen the determination of growers in Western Victoria to make the sales a success, as I believe they will be.

There are several things that can be done that will help the sales being a success and which may do much to lessen the brokers' and the buyers' resistance to sales at Portland. The most important matter is, of course, to have a large quantity of good wool offering for sale. If this is so, no matter what the brokers or what the buyers officially do, sufficient individual buyers would most certainly go along to buy the wool.

I hope all producer organisations will also lend their support to sales at Portland, thus giving some State wide support for a move that is certainly in the interest of decentralization of Victoria, and is, indeed, in the national interest of Australia.
I would hope that individual members of all woolgrowing organizations will do what they can to bring pressure to bear on the brokers and the buyers in this regard. It is worth noting that members of woolgrowing organizations in one way or another provide the bulk of the income for the brokers. Therefore, it is largely in the hands of individual woolgrowers as to how much pressure they can bring to bear.

Evidence can be given to the wool marketing Committee of Enquiry regarding action of the brokers and the buyers.

I have already brought the actions of the brokers and the buyers to the notice of the Attorney-General, Sir Garfield Barwick, and of the State Authorities. It is well known that the Commonwealth and the States are together examining possible Restrictive Trade Practices legislation. The Commonwealth has been engaged in this field for some time, but because of the division of powers it is felt that complementary legislation in both the Commonwealth and the States would be necessary for an effective law. If the brokers and the buyers take their opposition further they may well run foul of enquiries that are being made in this field.

Obviously, brokers will oppose sales at Portland because they say that existing facilities are adequate to meet present requirements and that therefore any extension of sales is undesirable. The buyers also take this view. These two bodies behave as though they are the sole arbiters as to whether or not a sale should be held in a certain place, and they appear to take little regard of the wishes of growers or of the fact that sales at Portland would categorically reduce transport costs to many growers, and would be a most important move in effective decentralization throughout Victoria.

Further, an additional reason the brokers do not mention which would inspire them to oppose sales at Portland is the fact that Portland Wool Brokers is an outside Company so far as the National Council of Wool Brokers is concerned, and those who are already in the National Council would object to a new Company being formed that would get some share of the business.

The brokers have clearly acted with regard to their own particular business interests, and some may therefore insist their action is understandable. However, that does not make it right, in the national interest it is wrong, and the national interest must prevail.

I am doing what I can on the political side to overcome this opposition to sales at Portland, but this is a fight in which everyone in Western Victoria must be concerned, especially the woolgrowers who, alone, in the last resort, can make sales a success by sending some of their wool to be sold at Portland. It is essential for Portland's future development that their sales be successful. If the sales are a success other things will follow at Portland which also will be of benefit to all the people of Western Victoria and south-east of South Australia.