PRESS STATEMENT:

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NATIONAL SERVICE TRAINING

Last week the Prime Minister introduced a defence statement which contained many important announcements for the three Services. One that is most important concerns National Service Training.

This first report will deal with this problem, but let me say at the outset that what a country can do in relation to defence depends on four things. The first of these concerns the essential quality of the people which in Australia is without equal; the second concerns the arms and the forces readily available; the third concerns our industrial capacity and the fourth concerns the nature of our friends and alliances. A balance must be kept between all of these.

For example, if you put too many people under arms and reduce your industrial capacity you will not be able to maintain your men in the fields. If your readily available arms are too small, you will have yourself in a vulnerable position. In this modern world I don't think any free country, even including America, is by itself free from attack and free from danger. Thus, it is essential to have alliances with other countries who believe in the same things as we do. In this respect it is most important that any possible hardship or sacrifice that is present in one country under possible threat should be, in some measure, comparable to the sacrifice of those countries which are expected to come to its aid.

Any conclusions about the extent of our arms and the degree of sacrifice that must be required or asked of the Australian people must, of course, be judged against the threat which confronts Australia; and I have said repeatedly in recent months that I believe this threat to be severe, and one which will demand a greater defence effort from Australia.

The program recently announced by the Prime Minister represents in many senses the culmination of a defence expansion begun in May, 1963. Since this time, defence expenditure has increased from a little over £200M. to about £300M. The new decisions just announced will increase the expenditure to well over £400M. a year. If additional decisions have to be made in the future the figure will be greater still.

Let me now come to the problem of manpower. The Navy and the Air Force believe that manpower requirements can be filled by voluntary means, and this is especially important for these two Services because a very high proportion of their people must be highly and technically trained, and in many cases it takes two years for this training to be completed. Thus it would appear that a twoyear system of National Service Training would add little to the effective capability of these two arms of the Forces. However, the position of the Army is different. Larger numbers of men are needed, and although there are many instances in which specialised and technical training is required the Army estimates that many people essential for the purposes of the Army can be properly trained in six months.

The increased pay and improved conditions of service announced in June this year were generous and it was hoped that these would attract a larger number of volunteers to the armed forces. They have failed to do so, and the Government has come to the conclusion, therefore, that it is not possible to attract to the Army a sufficient number of volunteers to supply the numbers the Government believes essential for Australia's defence. This is especially so since the effective target for the Army has been increased from 28,000 by 1967 to 33,000 by 1966.
If there are any people who doubt this conclusion they should have a close look at the new rates of pay and the changed conditions of service and judge their generosity for themselves. They should also remember that we are in a position of extremely full employment, and Army recruitment has always been slow in these circumstances. The last comprehensive alterations to the pay code for the armed forces occurred some years ago and was known as the Allison Report. This report led to an immediate effective improvement in recruiting, but the June statement has made no marked difference. This would lead one to the conclusion that further improvements in pay and conditions are unlikely to have much effect.

As a result, selective National Service Training will be introduced next June or July. The first call-up will involve a little over 4,000, subsequent call-ups will involve just under 7,000. National Servicemen will be called up for two years, with three years on the Reserve.

If anyone is particularly interested, I have full details of the proposed scheme; but let me say this at this time. In under two years the strength of the Army will be increased from the present 22,000 to 37,000. In addition, by 1968 there will be 18,000 ex-National Servicemen on the Reserve. Thereafter, this figure will stand at 21,000. These reserves would be available for service overseas in time of defence emergency, as would the Citizen Military Forces - which itself will be expanded to 35,000. Indeed, the system of National Service Training is designed to provide a stimulus for C.M.F. recruitment. If a person wishes to volunteer for six years efficient service in the C.M.F. his obligation to serve for two years in the A.R.A. will be indefinitely deferred.

Every young man will have to register before reaching the age of twenty, but as has already been indicated, only about 7,000 of roughly 100,000 in the age group will be required. There will be no general deferments by occupation but apprentices, students and married people will have their call-up deferred. There are important reasons for this. If an apprentice or a student is ballot for National Service it would, I think, be unreasonable to interrupt his training. In any case, on completion of his training he could well be of much more use to the Army. The people in each age group who will be chosen will be selected by ballot.

There is another most important matter. The law is going to be strengthened to maintain the re-employment rights of young people who do serve and, at the same time, the Commonwealth is considering the appropriate rehabilitation and re-establishment of National Servicemen after their two years service. One principle must be maintained. It is that no National serviceman will be penalised as a result of his service. Members of the Commonwealth Parliament have an individual and collective responsibility to see that this is so and I willingly accept my responsibility in this matter. This general problem is currently under review by the Government.

The regular soldier or the National serviceman who serves in special areas of combat may, of course, qualify for benefits under specified conditions of repatriation or war service homes.

There is only one other thing which I would like to mention in this report, and I hope this embodies the general spirit of Australia. During the week the "Herald" newspaper interviewed several young men and put their photographs on the front page. These people would be the age eligible for call-up, and according to the "Herald" everyone interviewed said that they were willing to serve their country. If this is an example of the general attitude of people of this age, we can have great courage and faith in the future.