PRESS STATEMENT:

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FURTHER DISCUSSION OF NATIONAL SERVICE

One aspect of the Government's defence proposals had met opposition from the Labour Party, therefore I want to reiterate the Government's reasons which have led to the reintroduction of national service training.

The Government believes that the strategic threat that confronts Australia has become much more serious and it points to the continued instability in south-east Asia and to Indonesia's confrontation of Malaysia. The Government believes that a much larger army is necessary than the one we now have. If there is agreement on this point it is a question of how you can achieve a larger army. The Government says that it is not possible to attract a sufficient number of volunteers. This decision has not been arrived at lightly but only after full consideration of all the circumstances. The pay and conditions of service were markedly improved last June in an effort to attract more volunteers. The substantial improvements however had little effect on recruitment.

The Government doubts the attraction that benefits of other kinds would have for people in the 17 or 18 year old age group who provide the greatest number of volunteers for the regular Army. Young men of this age are generally not concerned about establishing a home or about going to a doctor. Therefore, the provisions of general health benefits for volunteers or of homes under the War Service Homes legislation may have little or no additional effect on recruitment. Such benefits would be extremely expensive without any guarantee that they would achieve the desired result.

It is not generally realised that the re-engagement rate for the Army stands at the relatively high figure of 70% and wastage from all sources is less than 10%. This record is probably as good as any large non-Government industry.

There was a suggestion that the Government could attract more volunteers to the Army by lower education standards. Those who made this suggestion did not realise that the standards that are now followed were established in 1943 as a result of war time experience. It was found that people who could not meet these standards would be an administrative liability and a danger to their colleagues. The education standards are such that an average child of 10 or 12 would have no difficulty in passing them. In fact nobody has suggested any realistic way in which the number of volunteers coming forward for the Australian Regular Army could be dramatically improved under present conditions of full employment.

Since the Government's target for the Army has been greatly increased from 28,000 by 1967 to 33,000 effective by 1966 it is clear that the voluntary system would not produce the numbers that the strategic situation requires (the actual number by the end of 1966 will be 37,500 but a number of these will not be fully trained national service men).
The Government is also concerned to boost recruitment for the C.M.F. Thus, if people of call-up age are prepared to volunteer for six years efficient service in the C.M.F., provided they do this before their turn for balloting comes, their liability for full time service in the Australian Regular Army is permanently deferred. Service in the C.M.F. involves a relatively short annual camp with a certain number of parades throughout the year. It does not interrupt normal occupations which may be continued in civil life.

Having come to the decision that National Service is necessary, it is important that the kind of National Service be related to the strategic needs of Australia which requires highly trained readily available forces. For this reason the National Service of the 1950's type was not considered. Under this scheme very large number of men were trained but they were not readily available and, in addition, a large number of regular Army personnel were involved in the training thus reducing the immediate effective strength of the Australian Regular Army.

National Service is being introduced in its present form because it will add considerably to the immediate fighting ability of the Australian Regular Army. Once it has been fully introduced it will provide reserves of 21,000 who, like the 35,000 in the C.M.F. can be called out in a condition of defence emergency. When this time arrives Australia will have army forces totalling over 90,000 well trained men either in the Australian Regular Army, the emergency reserve, the C.M.F. or the regular reserve.

While the Australian Regular Army is available at all times the other Forces can be called up in any condition of defence emergency. They would be well trained and if the worst possible thing happened these forces would provide protection while full mobilisation took place.

But let me not be too gloomy about this. We intend to establish these forces in the hope that they will not have to be used, and I firmly believe that the likelihood of Australian forces being used on a large scale will be very much less as a result of the possession of these forces. Would be aggressors respect strength and our new program will give us a considerable force of our own.
MIGRANTS AND NATIONAL SERVICE

Some people have said it is unfair that Australians should be liable for service while non-naturalized migrants of the same age in Australia are not liable. This is a difficult point to overcome so let me explain the situation.

Under international law there is a general rule that citizens of one country will not be called up into the military forces of another country. During the National Service Scheme in the 1950's Australia tried to get other countries to modify this law on a bilateral basis but the Government was unsuccessful. It would be unwise for us to take unilateral action and subject migrants of call-up age to these conditions because this could well jeopardise the co-operation we get from many countries in our large and necessary immigration program. At the same time, there are a great number of Australians who travel abroad and countries would be able to retaliate against Australia by calling up Australians who may be visiting overseas. The Government, however, has been impressed with the need to involve migrants who intend to make their future home in Australia in the defence of this country and, therefore, the Government has written into the Act some incentive for migrants to volunteer for National Service. Every year of service will count as two years in the qualification period before a migrant can become naturalized as an Australian citizen. The normal qualifying period is five years. It is plain therefore that if a migrant wants to become naturalized in a shorter period of time he can do so by volunteering for service.

There is another side to this coin. People have tried to say that migrants not subject to call-up will take the jobs of Australians who are subject to call-up. These are unfortunate statements and will serve no purpose other than to cause ill-feeling between migrants and Australians. The provisions of the law have and will be further strengthened to maintain the re-establishment rights of national service men. Any national service man who has been employed for more than a month before call-up will have the right to get his job back from his employer on his release from service. If the employer does not co-operate the service man will have the right to appeal to a magistrate. The re-employment rights of national service men must be maintained and the Government must provide generous rehabilitation and training so that no national service man will be penalised as a result of his service.

I have previously said that each member of the Commonwealth Government should accept an individual and collective responsibility to see that these principles are carried out.