PRESS STATEMENT:

MALCOLM FRASER:

May 23rd, 1965

REFERENDUM - NUMBERS SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On April 28th the Prime Minister announced that there would be a referendum in relation to two matters. One of these concerned the relationship between the House of Representatives and the Senate. Under the Constitution as it now stands, the House of Representatives must be, as nearly as practicable, twice the size of the Senate. This could involve many problems for the future. As our population grows and as the work of Parliament grows it is probable that a moderate increase in the House of Representatives will be required from time to time. While the present relationship between the Senate and the House of Representatives remains it is very difficult to have such a moderate increase.

The Senate now holds 60 members. Since half the Senate is elected at each Representative election and since all the States must have an equality of votes in the Senate, it is clear that the minimum increase in the size of the Senate would be 12 to 72, then 6 Senators would retire at each election in each State. This would probably mean that any Government would be permanently dead-locked in the Senate because under the system of proportional representation it would be highly likely that the major parties would gain 3 seats each. In other words, you need an uneven number to be elected to the Senate at each election, 5 as we now have for each State, or 7. If 7 Senators retired at each election for each State, it would involve a Senate of 84, much larger than the present 60. Under the present constitutional relationship between the Senate and the House of Representatives this would mean the Lower House must have approximately 168 members. This would be a large and substantial increase not warranted under the present circumstances.

If a referendum is held at some stage in the future and approves the breaking of this connection between the two Houses, it would then be possible to leave the Senate at its present size of 60 and as the occasion warranted, increase the members in the House of Representatives by 6, 8, 10 or by whatever was thought necessary. Thus the breaking of the nexus between the two Houses would be designed to keep future increases in the Federal Parliament down to a minimum.

No official statement has been made about the details of this matter at the present point of time but they can be expected in the not too distant future.