PRESS STATEMENT
November 29th, 1959

MALCOLM FRASER:

During this last Session a small but important Bill was passed affecting the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization. In the past this Organization has been controlled by an executive of five members, only three of whom were full-time officers of the Department. The Bill increased the numbers of the executive from five to nine; five of whom will be full-time members and five of whom must also be scientists.

In the last few years the C.S.I.R.O. has had to undertake a great deal of new work. Its budget in the last ten years has increased from about £2 to £8 million. The work of the Organization has become more complex, and more important to many branches of Australian industry, particularly to our rural industries. The purpose of increasing the size of the executive is to try and take some of the weight of administration and direction off the shoulders of the Chairman of the Organization who is also, by virtue of his office, Chairman of the Executive. There is no doubt that the early death of Sir Ian Clunies Ross could easily have been hastened by the pressure under which he worked and by the responsibilities which he was determined to take on his own shoulders. The larger Executive may prevent future Chairmen of this Organization being overburdened by their extremely important office.

For the last ten years the emphasis so far as agricultural science has been concerned has been on research. This has had many beneficial results for primary producers. I don't think it would matter what branch of primary industry we may be in, whether it would be sheep, cattle or dairying, we would be able to point to some discovery of C.S.I.R.O. which has been of direct benefit to us. However, the fact that we have made important advances in this field does not necessarily mean that the work that remains to be done would diminish; on the contrary, I feel that there will always be important and urgent problems confronting our research officers. Indeed, many problems that we once thought were solved confront us again in a different form and research must be begun again from the beginning. The manner in which the blowfly has bred immunity to aldrin and dieldrin gives an example of this.
In addition, the problems of pasture improvement bring with them new problems to which we do not necessarily know the answers. I know of people in the last two winters who have had very severe problems in raising young calves and young cattle successfully. For some reason the stock have just not done well while veterinary tests have shown that they have been free from worms and the pastures were apparently healthy and in good order. Veterinary officers were not able to say why the cattle did not do well. This sort of thing presents problems which our research officers must try to solve.

Although the emphasis previously placed on research has had good results, it has also had some results which have not been good. The C.S.I.R.O. has become the glamour Organization. Its officers are, in general, paid higher salaries than officers in State Departments of Agriculture. In large measure Departments of Agriculture have, in many people's minds, had the appearance of the poor country cousin. This is wrong. The results of research will be lost unless an equal emphasis is placed on extension work. What I am saying here is in no way a criticism of the officers of various Departments of Agriculture. These officers do a magnificent job against extremely heavy odds. There are not enough of them and it is not just humanly possible for the officers of the Department of Agriculture to cover the areas which are assigned to them.

Indeed, I think there are several problems to which we know the scientific answer but for which we have completely inadequate facilities if we are going to try and solve these problems. I want to quote only one stock disease to make my point.

There is a disease in cattle — vibriosis. Its effect is to lower calving percentages. It can have a dramatic effect on percentages; on the other hand, it can result in about 10% to 15% loss each year, a loss which farmers may put down to natural causes but which is, in effect, due to vibriosis. Vibriosis is difficult to detect and difficult to control, but it can be controlled. I am told that over the whole of eastern Australia 80% of herds tested, and tested is the important word, have suffered from vibriosis. It may well be that a campaign is needed to control this disease in much the
same way that efforts have been made to control contagious abortion.

Under present circumstances it is quite impossible to institute such a campaign because the manpower just does not exist. This is important because in days when returns to primary producers are not particularly good, an extra 10% or 15% in calving each year could mean the difference between profit and loss.

All this is not anyone’s fault. I think it has been the natural result of the general thinking of the last decade which has placed more emphasis on research than on extension.

Primary producers will be able to achieve maximum efficiency only if scientific officers both in the research and in the extension fields have the necessary resources. In future money and scientific manpower must be divided more equally between each. When we realise that research and the application of successful research afford primary producers the best means of reducing costs then we know how important this is.
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