PRESS STATEMENT

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MALCOLM FRASER:

GOVERNMENT AID TO PRIMARY PRODUCERS

Last week I summarised briefly some of the things which have been done over the last ten years to aid primary production. Today I wish to deal briefly with research arrangements that have been introduced in recent years, and I also want to say a few words about the future relationship between different Primary Industry Organizations and the Government.

In the sphere of research the Government has passed legislation to establish Trust Funds or Trust Accounts so that research could be expanded in the following primary industries – wool, wheat, tobacco, dairy produce, butter and cheese, wine and beef. The Government, in these research funds subsidises, generally on an equal basis, the contributions that are made by the members of the different primary industries. For example, under the Wool Research Act, which establishes the Wool Research Committee, the growers contribute at the moment 2/- a bale, while 4/- a bale comes from the Commonwealth for wool research.

In addition, this organization has a reserve of £8M, some of which recent negotiations may make available for immediate research of one kind or another.

In this recent Session of Parliament a Cattle and Beef Reserve Trust Account was established. Under this the maximum rate of levy is 2/- per beast killed, and for every £1. collected the Commonwealth would contribute another £1. to research. In a normal year a levy from the Industry should be over £300,000, making £600,000 available with the Government contribution.

In addition to this there is the Dairy Industry Trust Account which was established in 1958 to establish a research and sales program to aid the Dairy Industry.

I don’t think there is any need for me to underline the work that these Research Funds and Research Committees are doing. I think, for our respective industries, we all know that research is vital, and we all know that it can help to make us not only more efficient, but it can also help us to turn out a better product at a cheaper price.
Even though the Government has done a great deal to assist primary industries over its ten years of office, I would not pretend to say that more will not need to be done in the future. I believe the development of our primary industries in this country is a continuous process of evolution, and as some problems are conquered and overcome other ones will continually arise. This is particularly so in the field of research, not only research into farmers individual problems but research into how to improve the finished product. This is particularly noticeable in the wool textile field. I would not be surprised if the next ten to fifteen years saw a minor revolution in our research set-up throughout the Commonwealth. By this I don't mean to say that our present Organizations are inefficient. Within the limits of their resources the C.S.I.R.O. and State Departments have done a wonderful job, but when we have regard to the fact that better research offers the best and perhaps the only real means of reducing farmers' costs, then we can see how important this is. An increasing proportion of our resources will probably have to be devoted to these ends in both State and Federal spheres.

This problem might not have been so important over the last ten years when in general, except for the last year or two, we have had seasons that have been better than average and prices that have been much better than average. But over the next ten years our primary industries, while they will still be profitable, will not have such an easy time as they have had over the last ten and, therefore, more intensive efforts in regard to research and sales promotion and organization generally will be most important.

There is one matter in this regard in which primary industries can do a great deal to help themselves and, at the same time, help the Government. In nearly every Industry, whether you take wool, butter or beef or any of the other primary industries, there is more than one organization representing the Industry. Now that is perfectly all right, it doesn't matter how many organizations represent the Industry so long as the organizations do their jobs sincerely and well, and I believe that this is nearly always the case. However, organizations have not done sufficient to liaise amongst themselves, and very often
they give conflicting advice to the Government. The Government quite rightly says it will do what it can to help industries when they know exactly what the industry wants, but the Government's hands are tied and the organization is tied if one half of an industry says do this and another half of an industry says do that. In this part of Western Victoria when I speak in this way people will most probably think of wool, but there are other examples which, in their own way are, or to the people concerned, just as important.

Two months ago the Federal Parliament passed the legislation to establish the Cattle and Beef Research Trust Account. This legislation would have been passed three years ago and research would have been begun three years ago if the organizations concerned, representing beef interests, had not been squabbling among themselves on the composition of the Beef Research Committee. The organizations were concerned with their own importance and with their own representation and they were prepared to hold up the establishment of a Beef Research Trust Account for three years to satisfy the vanity of themselves or of their own organizations. When industry leaders act in this way they are not giving their members a fair go. It means the people who are growing beef are not getting the benefits that they should be getting from membership of their different organizations. This problem was solved in regard to beef research after constant negotiations between the Minister and the different organizations, but it took three years and three years of research were lost.

The example of this Beef Trust Account should serve as a warning to all primary producers.

If economic conditions are going to be more difficult over the next ten years it is essential that the different industries, whether it be wool, beef, dairying or any of the others, should all be in a position to give united, concerted and sensible advice to the Government so that the Government may act firmly in the interests of the different industries. If the experience of the past is ignored, and if conflicting and differing advice is given to Governments, then the Governments' efforts to help primary producers will be made extremely difficult, if not impossible.