TEXT OF RADIO TALK BY THE HON. MALCOLM FRASER, MEMBER FOR WANNON & MINISTER FOR EDUCATION & SCIENCE

Today I want to talk about three or four matters - about the countout in the Federal Parliament, the opening of the wool sales, the development of Portland trade and my resumption of the responsibilities of Education and Science.

On the last day of sitting, the Parliament was counted out. That means that when the quorum bells rang there were not sufficient members in the Parliament in terms of the standing orders to enable the sitting to continue. At that time, there were about 35 Government Members and about 5 Opposition Members in the Parliament. It is in fact the Government's responsibility to see that the numbers are maintained, and the Government must carry the responsibility. I am quite certain it will do so in the future even if there are going to be very few members of the Opposition within the Parliament itself. Ironically, Eddy Ward, who is one of the most redoubtable fighters that the Opposition has ever had, had been trying to get the Government counted out during his many years in the Parliament over a very long period of time. He never succeeded in doing so, and when it did happen it happened very much by accident. It was not planned, it was just one of those things that occur. I am quite sure that all members in the Government parties will be taking the matter seriously to see that the numbers are maintained.

In this last week we have seen the opening of the wool sales, and as I record this talk the second day of the sales are designed to continue. There was a warning from the Minister for Primary Industry that if demand for wool at the sales did not pick up, the sales might be again suspended. The disastrous opening was very much a result of international currency crisis caused by movements in overseas financial arrangements by major trading countries in the world. It has been specifically prompted by action taken by President Nixon to preserve the status of the United States dollar. It is going to be
difficult to see how these changes and arrangements ultimately work themselves out but we've certainly seen the impact of the uncertainty they've caused on the wool sales this week.

In these circumstances, the 36 cents guaranteed price as an Australian average for the entire clip becomes of much greater significance than was originally thought, perhaps, to every Australian wool grower. It might well cost the Treasury much more than had been anticipated. Incidentally, I am told that there is still doubt by a number of people as to how this deficiency or subsidy payment will work. If anyone has questions to ask about it if they write to me, I'll certainly answer immediately and give them what information I have.

The third matter that I would like to mention concerns trade through the port of Portland and this week we have seen some encouraging reports about the build up of trade through the Port. The Harbour Trust Commissioners and all those involved must take the credit for it. While the news of the trade through the Port was generally good, it is unfortunate that developments of recent years have reduced trade through the Port on some items. I understand these are largely wool, butter, dairying products or frozen meat that go overseas in containers through Melbourne.

In relation to these matters, Sir William Gunn wrote an interesting speech a few days ago in which he pointed out that if you are going to use the cheapest methods of transport within Australia, Portland should be one of the major ports, that it should be used much more than is now the case. This would, of course, involve changed shipping arrangements but he indicated that the Australian Wool Board is looking into these matters. Sir William pointed out that this would be possible by using the cheapest method of transport within Australia, by the abandonment of restrictive legislation, which in fact establishes in many instances a state railway monopoly. If you did this, it would be possible to save about $1.20 a bale for the whole wool clip and this would be $6¼ million - $6½ million which would mean a great deal to wool growers and certainly a sum which is worth going out after, in Sir William Gunn's words. I understand that this is what the Wool Board is seeking to do.
The last matter that I would like to mention concerns resumption of my own responsibilities for the Commonwealth Ministry of Education and Science. I enjoyed this particular portfolio up to two years ago when I moved to Defence. Education is close to the knees of a very large number of people. It is important for the future well-being of a very large part of Australia. Above all else, investment in education is investment for the future and the future strength and well-being and quality of Australia.

In recent times, education from Commonwealth and State resources has been attracting an increasing share of national wealth, and there are many needs in this particular area as I well know. Amongst my first tasks in getting up to date with what’s been happening will be to make contact with the State Ministers, with those responsible for the independent education systems so that I may again be fully aware of how all the responsible authorities feel about these matters.

C.S.I.R.O., of course, also comes within my responsibilities and here again I am glad to have contact with an organisation which ought to be able to do a great deal by its research to assist primary producers of one kind or another. I have already had initial talks with the Chairman of C.S.I.R.O. and will be looking forward to hearing what their views are in the way the Organisation can best assist producers in the current situation. I know the Organisation is conducting a major review of all its wool research. I am not sure yet that many of us realise how much the need for research has in fact altered. The question used to be "how can we get maximum production per acre," and that automatically in high wool price years gave the maximum return to the farmer. But now the emphasis on research needs to be how to get the cheapest production per acre, and this might involve some changed orientation of the C.S.I.R.O’s research effort. This is the matter which the Organisation has under active review at the present time.