I probably spend more time in these talks discussing wool than any other matter, and in a part of Australia such as ours that is reasonable enough. In recent years, we have seen considerable diversification in western Victoria, and I believe that is a good thing. But the prosperity of the region still depends to a large extent on the economic health of the wool industry.

Having this in mind, I was particularly pleased to read the recent statement by the Minister for Primary Industry, Mr. Sinclair, foreshadowing a Government decision on wool acquisition proposals now before the Government within six weeks. Mr. Sinclair, as the Minister responsible for putting the proposals from the Wool Industry Conference to Cabinet, is best equipped to anticipate the timing of the decision.

It was interesting for me to note the Country Party Leader, Mr. Anthony, indicating his Party’s commitment to wool marketing reform, basically along the lines I enunciated in 1963 as a private member. Acquisition at that time was most unpopular and even the more moderate floor price proposals were defeated by referendum. But, of course, as a Cabinet Minister I cannot now commit myself to proposals before Cabinet makes a decision on the matter.

While acquisition is much discussed at the moment, I think we should all bear in mind that the proposals put to the Government by the Wool Industry Conference are not an open and
shut plan, but are a set of general principles. They do not specify financial arrangements which would be crucial to the success of any acquisition plan. If you are going to have an acquisition proposal financed by a grower levy, as the Labor Party spokesman, Dr. Patterson, has stated, I doubt if it could get off the ground. How many growers could afford such a levy at the present time?

Even the Chairman of the Wool Industry Conference, Mr. Vasey, stated in his letter covering the submission to Mr. Sinclair, that probably not all of the powers recommended for the proposed new authority would require immediate implementation and some powers would need supporting legislation by the States. He also wrote that the proportion of wool likely to be sold outside the auction system in the foreseeable future would be small.

All this means that the Commonwealth was not presented with a complete and total plan which could be implemented by Commonwealth decision or legislation alone, and therefore the matter requires the fullest consideration. Whatever we do we must do correctly.

Therefore, Mr. Sinclair's remark that he hoped a statement of Government policy would be possible well in advance of the opening of the new wool selling season on July 1, was a welcome indication from the Minister most closely associated with the proposals and responsible for putting the matter before Cabinet.

The decisiveness with which the Government has tackled the wool industry problems in the past - the Deficiency Payments Scheme and the Australian Wool Commission, both of which have proved their value to the industry - makes it quite plain that we regard the matter as highest priority.
A decision will be made just as soon as the Government is satisfied it has adequately examined all aspects of the proposals now before it.

I turn now to another important aspect of our local economy - the question of unemployment. As you know, the Commonwealth has recognised the special problems of unemployment in country areas, and has committed substantial sums of money to help overcome them. At the Premiers' Conference last February, the Commonwealth agreed to double the grants we were providing to the States to boost non-metropolitan employment. They now amount to $4.5 million a month, a rate of $54 million a year.

The States allocate the money to local government authorities and governmental and semi-governmental bodies to provide jobs for people outside the capital city.

While these enormous sums may sound impressive, it is only when one relates them to our local situation that one appreciates the impact they must be having in providing work for many people.

Let me give an example or two of the total amounts allocated by the Victorian Government in Wannon for this purpose so far. Warrnambool City has received $39,900 and Warrnambool Shire $17,000. Hamilton has received $36,950 and the Kowree Shire $10,200. In fact every local authority in Wannon has benefited from the grants and the total disbursements to Wannon stand at more than $264,000 so far.
4.

It is vitally important for economic and social reasons that reasonable employment prospects be maintained in our part of the country. The provision of these grants is just one other example of the way in which the Commonwealth is determined to support people who live in rural areas.

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