For a long time country people have complained, and I believe often with some justification, that decentralisation has been nothing but a political catchcry.

I know that Governments have implemented measures over the years, but it has been an uphill battle against Australia's natural growth of the major cities at the expense of the country.

Last week the Prime Minister announced the Commonwealth Government's proposals which I believe should have a major impact on the whole problem of growth in rural areas. The new regional development proposals will complement the Victorian Government's decentralisation measures announced earlier in the month.

We will be establishing a new National Urban Regional Development Authority which will have among its major objectives, the development of regional growth centres.

I will enlarge on the proposals in a moment, but before I do I want to say that decentralisation is an objective which has advantages to both the city and country dweller.

It helps to maintain our country way of life at a time when many of us feel that is under threat. But it also offers further opportunities to relieve the growing concentration of population, industry and commercial activities in existing major cities.

A report by a committee of Commonwealth and State officials has concluded that the only type of decentralisation which offers significant prospects of success is selective decentralisation.
The Commonwealth will pursue this course but it will be by no means a simple process. Ways and means will have to be devised to attract to the selected locations the employment and industries which would be basic to their establishment and their faster growth.

This will be a co-ordinated programme, financially, and in other ways with the States, directed towards fostering a better balance of population distribution and regional development in Australia. The Commonwealth's programme would be separate from, and additional to, present State programmes encouraging decentralisation.

There will be a Ministerial Council established, consisting of the Prime Minister and Premiers. This will be the principal body for consultation and co-ordination in the fields of regional and urban development.

Our own Commonwealth machinery will provide for the establishment of the National Urban and Regional Development Authority which I have already mentioned. The Commonwealth also has in mind the establishment of an advisory committee or committees where they are necessary and these will include members of various organisations and groups chosen for their expertise in their relevant fields.

Co-operation and co-ordination with the States are vital components of the new proposals. The Victorian Government is establishing a new Department of Development and Decentralisation. The State's decentralisation plans include dividing the State into regions each with a capital and several other centres as district headquarter towns. Among other measures will be positive financial initiatives for decentralised industry.

Recent specific measures that the Commonwealth have taken must not be overlooked here. We have recently announced special financial initiatives for country employers engaging new apprentices. Beginning next year a subsidy of $194 a year for each new apprentice will be paid to metropolitan employers...
and $388, exactly double the city rate, to country employers.

The double rate for country employers aims to make a decided impact on apprenticeship opportunities for young people in country centres and to help those country centres meet their needs for tradesmen.

The special living-away-from-home allowances for country apprentices will be continued and extended to cover country apprentices in all trades.

The Commonwealth believes it is important to define the relationships, roles and contributions which will characterise future co-operation between the Commonwealth and the States if effective action is to be taken to cope with the problems of the cities and to promote regional development.

This kind of partnership should make a major contribution to improving the quality of life in the Australian community.
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