WANNON ELECTORAL STATEMENT BY THE HON. MALCOLM
FRASER, M.P. – SUNDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER.

I have had some disturbing news for a number of communities in this electorate. During the Budget there was a general statement that the Postmaster-General was considering closing a number of non-official post offices and down-grading others. He is considering over the whole of Australia closing 1,000 non-official post offices and down-grading 300.

I have been able to find out from the Department that 19 non-official post offices in Wannon are involved and it is likely that three official post offices are being examined for down-grading to non-official status. These three are Macarthur, Merino and Penshurst. These are all significant communities and it would be quite wrong to down-grade the quality of service that is provided. It is probably even more disturbing to find that 19 post offices are up for closure, and the post offices concerned are:

Bushfield  Mepunga West  Poolaigelo
Casterton West  Minhamite  Powers Creek
Cheran  Noutajup  Spring Gardens
Chetwynd  Mt. Richmond  Wallacedale
Hamilton North  Nareen  Wannon
Lower Norton Creek  Merrin Merrin
Mailors Flat  Nurrabiel

I am sorry to read out a long list like this, but I know that people who live in particular communities will want to know whether their own post office is involved.

I have made the strongest representations I can to the Postmaster-General and I will do all I can to see that the decisions are reversed.

Australian meat producers are still in suspense about the Government's reaction to the report by the Labor Members of the Parliamentary Prices Committee concerning a very heavy export tax on export beef. I have already said that the sort of tax they have in mind is 12½ which would raise about $160 to $170 million a year. The Government has made no decision about this matter.
The Minister for Primary Industry, Ken Wreidt, whom I like very much as a person, has said that he personally is opposed to the tax. I am glad he has made this statement, because even though he has broken Cabinet solidarity in making his personal opinion known before the matter is discussed in Cabinet, he has at least made it hard for the Government to accept a thoroughly foolish decision.

I know the kind of advice that the Minister gets from his Department of Primary Industry, and if he has supported that advice in Cabinet discussions as I believe he often would have, he has clearly had a number of defeats throughout the course of the last nine months. Senator Wreidt might have decided that this export meat tax was an issue on which he should stick and not accept a further defeat. If that is so, meat producers will be able to rest a little easier, at least until the city-based Labor Party prepares itself for another attack on the rural economy.

During the last week the Government pushed through both Houses of Parliament in one day and with a very few hours debate the proposals for a prices and incomes referendum.

The Liberal Party will be opposing giving the Commonwealth Government these additional powers. We believe that the Commonwealth has ample power to reduce inflation to reasonable levels, especially if the Commonwealth is prepared to act in concert and cooperation with the States. Both our Premier, Dick Hamer, and Sir Robert Askin have promised the fullest possible cooperation, and thus there is no need for more power being given to Canberra.

I have always believed that a division of power is important, and this is especially so when you see how power is used. At the moment there is a very severe power strike in New South Wales which is causing hardship to a very large number of people. One of the newspapers reported a doctor being blacked out while trying to save the life of a heart attack patient. That just shows how strikes of this kind come right down to personal hardship and difficulty in the home.
The Prime Minister has said that the Commonwealth will not intervene in this particular dispute because it is a State matter in New South Wales. That would have been alright except for the fact that one of his Ministers has intervened.

The story is quite clear. Last Sunday the Minister directed that the Snowy Mountains Council supply power to New South Wales in accordance with the wishes of the striking power unions. He tried to keep this directive secret. He tried to say that what he had done was because of flooding but, contrary to the Prime Minister's statement that the Commonwealth has no right to intervene, the Minister for Minerals and Energy has intervened on the side of the striking power unions, on the side of industrial lawlessness, against the Industrial Commission in New South Wales, against the New South Wales Government, and against the people of New South Wales who are the ones who will suffer. In more detail this is what happened.

The Chief Engineer on the Snowy Mountains got a demand from the unions to reduce power output. The unions, who were in any case reducing power output for New South Wales stations, wanted this action from the Snowy Mountains power stations so that their restrictions would be more severely felt in New South Wales, as they believed they would then have a greater possibility of forcing the Government to accept a 35-hour week.

The Minister for Minerals and Energy, Mr. Connor, told the Snowy Mountains Engineer to talk to the unions. On the Sunday there was a vote of the Snowy Mountains Council, which is responsible for the power producing operations. They voted to continue supplying power to New South Wales normally. After that vote was taken the Minister gave a directive to the Snowy Mountains Council to make sure that the Council only delivered power to New South Wales in accordance with the dictates of the power unions' 35-Hour Week Committee.

The Minister has been evasive and I believe he has misled the Parliament because he did not take the action he did because of flooding, as his own letter, which I read into the Hansard, has proved. I have said the Minister ought to resign and I have also said the Parliament should be recalled so that it can debate the censure of the Minister which now stands in the books of the Parliament. This is a very
serious matter and it shows how power can be used secretly to the disadvantage of hundreds of thousands of people. It is an abuse of power which ought not to be tolerated.

As a result of the Minister's intervention, on the basis of advice available to me, power produced by the Snowy Mountains for New South Wales was reduced from a normal 1,200 megawatts to 200 megawatts last Monday.

This doesn't only affect New South Wales, because Victoria gets considerable power from the Snowy Mountains system. If the Minister can intervene secretly and there are power cuts for New South Wales, in similar circumstances he can do the same sort of thing for Victoria.