This week I would like to talk with you about Victoria's decision to join the Commonwealth marginal dairy farms reconstruction scheme ... ACTU plans for a 35-hour working week and local support for Vietnamese families.

MARGINAL DAIRY FARM PLAN

I was pleased to learn that Victoria has agreed to join the proposed Commonwealth dairy farms reconstruction scheme.

This scheme ensures that dairy farmers, whose properties have insufficient potential to become viable economic units may dispose of their land and improvements at market value.

It will enable low income farmers to leave the industry if they wish to with dignity and will allow their small farms to be amalgamated with other nearby properties.

Dairy industry leaders have given strong support for this scheme.

The Commonwealth will provide up to $25 million over a four year period to enable the States to implement the scheme. Of the money to be used by Victoria in this scheme 50% will be a grant from the Commonwealth. The remaining 50% will be a loan repayable with interest at the current long-term bond rate.

The Commonwealth is prepared, on the grant and loan basis I have mentioned, to finance those farmers who voluntarily leave the industry and the farmers whose properties will be built up.

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The Commonwealth is also prepared to find all the money for the writing off of redundant assets on marginal farms.

It has been estimated that throughout Australia there are about 24,000 dairy farms receiving a net income of less than $2,000 a year.

Many of these dairy farmers are operating properties that cannot provide an income adequate to maintain a standard of living which is acceptable in the Australian community.

In Victoria, for example, it is estimated that there are up to 7,500 butterfat producing farms which have a net farm income less than $2,000 a year.

Through the Government's marginal dairy farm reconstruction scheme, any low income dairy farmer who wishes voluntarily to quit the industry can obtain a fair price for his farm, rather than being forced out by economic strangulation.

The scheme will help dairy farmers and importantly it will assist the economics of those districts where low-income farmers are concentrated.

As the scheme progresses, it will contribute towards a solution of the problem of over-supply of butterfat.

The scheme will help solve a social problem in the rural sector and do so in a way that will benefit the dairy industry, the dairy farmer and the economy.
ACTU AND 35-HOUR WEEK

I was not so happy to learn this week that the ACTU executive has launched its campaign for a 35 hour working week throughout Australian industry.

Mr. Hawke and the ACTU executive is setting out to implement the ACTU Congress resolution of 1969 which called on the whole trade union movement to support any campaign by the ACTU for "a shorter working week of a maximum of 35 hours".

The Labour Movement's plan to introduce a 35 hour working week this year will be a crippling blow to all Australians.

The rural industries, with their high costs and low returns, will particularly be hard hit if the Labour Movement's policy is carried through.

The type of campaign being mounted by the ACTU must be resisted by primary and secondary producers, employers and the Government.

The Prime Minister has said that a shorter working week in the present period of inflationary trends would be "catastrophic" and I agree with him.

My colleague, the Minister for Labour and National Service estimates that a 35-hour working week would cost between $1,400 million and $2,000 million a year if employers chose to employ more labour to maintain production.

Alternatively, if employers sought to maintain production through increased overtime the cost increase would be between $2,100 million and $2,900 million.
In terms of percentages the increases would be between 9% and 19%.

But the 35-hour working week, at this time, will result in greatly increased costs for everyone.

One of the worst features of such a plan is that the worker will be no better off with the shortened working week. The best the worker can expect is higher money wages, which because of the higher prices for everything he buys, will buy no more.

At this time I find it hard to think of any action which can do more damage to Australia and Australians.

I believe the time for less work has not yet arrived. Both the individual and the community has too many pressing needs, and these needs cannot be met unless they are worked for.

LOCAL HELP FOR VIETNAMESE

There have been suggestions this week that assistance to needy Vietnamese families is to be stopped. I can assure you that this is not correct. Programmes of aid by Government and private sources are continuing and will be maintained at a high level.

I commend listeners to Operation New Life, which is conducted by the Army and the RSL.

This aid programme allows private individuals, families, church groups or service clubs to collect items which are shipped by the Army to Vietnam where they are
distributed to families in rural villages and hamlets, to orphanages and aged or invalid homes.

Details of what items are needed in Vietnam are held by the RSL and those listeners interested in helping a needy Vietnamese family should contact their local branch of the RSL.
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