Cyclone Tracy

Introduction

Decision 1958 on submission 905, ‘Australian Government participation in national disaster measures’ [A5915, 905]
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Introduction

The first two documents relate to the establishment of the Natural Disasters Organisation (NDO) as envisaged in Labor’s 1972 Policy Speech. Decision 1974 (EC), approved by Cabinet on 26 February, is especially noteworthy for overriding Frank Crean’s recommendation to re-affirm the States’ primary role in providing relief and restoration. In keeping with the Whitlam approach in other areas involving Commonwealth funding, the Australian Government asserted both its authority and its pre-eminent role.

Major-General Alan Stretton became the first head of the NDO, which was then seriously tested when Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin on Christmas morning 1974. The final death toll was 49 in the city and 16 lost at sea; 70 per cent of Darwin homes were destroyed or structurally damaged; and within six days 25 000 people were evacuated (Darwin’s population had been 48 000). Whitlam was overseas when Tracy struck. Cairns – as Acting Prime Minister – assumed overall command, and he and his wife visited Darwin on Boxing Day. Within three days of the disaster, Cairns took submission 1518 into Cabinet. Three of his comments are especially notable: the full extent of the disaster was unclear on 28 December; the disaster was on a scale unprecedented in Australian history; and the problems – both immediate and longer-term – were ‘beyond the range of previous experience’. The Cairns submission shows – before the finger pointing started – how the Government acted quickly, decisively and with considerable sensitivity in unfamiliar territory (for example, in recognising that it would need to direct assistance to private individuals to rebuild). Cairns sought to impose order onto complexity, urging that all problems be tackled in ‘a systematic, co-ordinated and coherent way’. Tom Uren (Urban and Regional Development) and Rex Patterson (Northern Territory) [submission 1519] and Les Johnson (Housing) [A5931, CL 1350, ff. 19–18] all stressed the importance of building a new Darwin, rather than merely reconstructing the old. Cabinet, which met at Kirribilli on 30 December (Whitlam had returned to Australia), approved the Uren-Patterson proposals [decision 3092], and by then would have been aware of arguments about the continued role of the NDO and of bureaucratic problems emerging over coordination [Munro to Menadue in A5931, CL1350, f. 22].

The days after Tracy mark a high point in Cairns’ political career – in terms of stature and popularity – although he reignited the ‘Junie Morosi issue’ by appointing her as his private secretary on 29 December.
Decision 1958 on submission 905, ‘Australian Government participation in national disaster measures’ [A5915, 905]

CABINET MINUTE

Sydney, 18 February 1974

Decision No. 1958

Submission No. 905 – 1. Australian Government Participation in National Disaster Measures

2. Financial Assistance to States for Disaster Relief and Restoration Measures

The Prime Minister reported to the Cabinet that, at its meeting held earlier during the day, the Economic Committee had agreed to recommend to the Cabinet that:

(a) the present Civil Defence Organisation be replaced by a Natural Disasters Organisation to be responsible for co-ordinating Australian Government efforts in major natural disasters with those of State and local voluntary organisations;

(b) the charter of the existing Australian Civil Defence School at Mount Macedon, Victoria be expanded to provide research into and training to deal with natural disasters, and the School be appropriately renamed;

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(c) the Prime Minister be authorised to telegraph Premiers proposing that the Minister for Defence should hold discussions with appropriate State Ministers at an early date on arrangements for combatting natural disasters;

(d) the appropriate location in Queensland for a third emergency Broadcasting Station be examined;

(e) the Treasurer be authorised to pursue the offer of the Australian Insurance Association to discuss the inclusion of cover for natural disasters in housing insurance policies;

(f) the Treasurer take up with the Commonwealth Bank the question of the cover offered in insurance policies on houses which it finances;

(g) the Department of Housing and Construction should in future only advance money for Welfare housing and Defence Service homes and houses under the Servicemen's Homes Agreement where the Departments of Urban and Regional Development and Environment and Conservation have certified that the land is suitable for housing construction;

(h) the Treasurer take up with the Banks, Insurance Companies and Financial Corporations which are subject to Australian Government legislation the question of similarly restricting their housing loans;

(i) where the Australian Government is providing funds in excess of a State's base expenditure on natural disasters strict conditions be applied to ensure that relief and restoration measures are in accordance with the policies of the Australian Government;
Decision No. 1958 (cont.)

(j) the specific proposals the Treasurer has made for further assistance to the States in developing and improving the efficiency of their own emergency services be noted;

(k) the question of insurance cover for owners of property (excluding crops and livestock) against loss or damage from natural disasters be considered at an early stage as part of any general investigation into insurance referred to in paragraph 46 of the Submission;

(l) the question of a Natural Disaster Crop and Livestock Insurance Fund be referred to an interdepartmental committee comprising representatives of the Departments of Primary Industry, Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Treasury which should consult other interested Departments as appropriate.

2. The Cabinet approved the Committee's recommendations.

(Note: Cabinet Decision No. 1943(EC), dated 18 February 1974, which was not available at the time of the Prime Minister's report, records the recommendations of the Economic Committee in the terms set out above.)

Certified true copy

[Signature]

for Secretary to Cabinet
CABINET MINUTE

Economic Committee

Sydney, 18 February 1974

Decision No. 1974(EC)
(To be read with Decision No. 1958)

Submission No. 905 – 1. Australian Government Participation in National Disaster Measures
2. Financial Assistance to States for Disaster Relief and Restoration Measures

On 18 February the Cabinet confirmed recommendations contained in a draft minute recording the outcome of the deliberations of the Economic Committee earlier in the day on Submission No. 905 – see Decision No. 1958.

2. Recommendations of the Committee which were not brought forward to the Cabinet in the draft minute and which therefore still require confirmation are:

(a) the Committee, while not expressing views as to the structure of the Natural Disasters Organisation, noted that the Minister for Defence had in mind that the line of authority for the Organisation should be drawn through the Secretary, Department of Defence to the Minister;

(b) in relation to the policies of the Government referred to in paragraph (i) of Decision No. 1958, the Committee had in mind that...
when assistance is being approved for
the rebuilding of roads, railways etc.,
consideration should be given to the
need in some cases to re-site them to
avoid the possibility in future of a
recurrence of flood damage, even though
this could involve additional expenditure
initially;

(c) the Committee felt that the role of the
Australian Government should be more
positive than is envisaged in the
recommendation contained in paragraph
48 (a) of paper 2. of the Submission,
i.e. there should not be reaffirmation
of the attitude that the States have
primary responsibility for administering
natural disaster relief and restoration
measures.

Certified true copy

Committee Secretary
The cyclone which struck Darwin in the early hours of Christmas morning largely demolished this city.

2. Close to 50 people – the number could be larger than that – were killed and some 500 suffered substantial injury.

3. Most of the houses, probably more than 10,000 of them, were damaged beyond repair. Few other buildings escaped serious damage. There was virtually total disruption of water, sewerage, electricity, communications and other services.

4. The extent of damage beyond the city itself is as yet practically unknown.

5. This is a disaster the like of which we have not seen in Australia before. The problems it has raised, both of an immediate kind and for the future, are beyond the range of previous experience.

6. An effort to cope with the most urgent of the immediate problems has of course already been mounted but, even with these, much still remains to be done. Many other difficult and complex problems of major proportions lie ahead.
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2.

7. It is vitally important that all these problems be tackled in a systematic, co-ordinated and coherent way.

8. In this Submission I raise a series of matters which, as I see it, we need to consider at this stage in order to develop such an approach to the problems.

A. THE EVACUATION EXERCISE

9. Action to safeguard the health and welfare of the population of Darwin must obviously have top priority. Given the conditions in Darwin, rapid evacuation of a large proportion of the population was clearly needed. At this stage, and for some time to come, it would not make sense to have there people who are not really needed.

10. A large-scale evacuation exercise is well under way.

11. I expect that Cabinet will agree that this exercise should be pressed ahead with as expeditiously as possible, and that all necessary facilities (aircraft, etc.) should be organised for it.

12. Those being evacuated may be broadly classified into three groups: injured; those who will be going to relatives or friends; and others for whom different accommodation will have to be provided, such as accommodation that is available at Commonwealth Hostels. All need to be helped.

13. The cost of transportation facilities being arranged on behalf of the Government for the carriage of evacuees is being accepted as the Government's responsibility.

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14. I ask Cabinet to confirm this acceptance of responsibility, and to agree to continued acceptance of it through to the completion of the evacuation exercise.

15. Action has been taken to establish emergency centres in the State mainland capital cities and at Alice Springs and Mt. Isa for processing and recording of evacuees.

16. Arrangements have also been made for the Department of Social Security to make immediate cash payments to evacuees to assist with the special short term financial needs they will have. The amounts of these are the equivalent to two weeks special benefit of $31 a week ($51.50 for a married couple) plus $5.50 a week for each child,

17. It is proposed that, for those for whom the Government will be providing accommodation in hostels, such accommodation be provided free during the first fortnight.

18. This still leaves for consideration what assistance, beyond normal social welfare provisions, might be needed beyond the first fortnight of the evacuation period. In this regard, we need to recognise that, for many of the people concerned, this period could be a very lengthy one. Moreover, it is not to be assumed that those coming out of Darwin at this stage will all be returning. For some, perhaps a sizeable proportion, it may be a matter of re-locating elsewhere.

19. Obviously this whole question of assistance beyond the first fortnight needs to be considered very carefully, albeit with considerable urgency. Cabinet may wish to invite the Minister for Social Security to develop, in consultation as appropriate with other Ministers, specific proposals for early consideration.
20. It seems to me that it is also important to have clearly established at this stage which particular Minister or Ministers should be primarily responsible for the carriage and oversight, at the Minister level, of the evacuation exercise or different parts thereof. Two principal components of this exercise are arrangements for physical movement of the evacuees and arrangements for the welfare of the evacuees when they have been moved.

B. DARWIN

21. Looking to the situation in Darwin itself, the problems confronting us there are of enormous complexity. While there is much to be done immediately, it would be quite wrong to be rushing to try to do things now which ought to be left to take their place, in terms of proper sequence, at a later stage. We need to develop a strategy or framework for approaching the problems in Darwin which will lead to a proper ordering of decisions and activities that recognises the different time-frames involved.

The Different Phases:

22. I suggest that we should be thinking in terms of there being five different phases. I identify these briefly as follows :-

(a) the immediate emergency;
(b) establishment and maintenance of a working "law and order" situation;
(c) the major "clean up";
(d) planning of the future Darwin; and
(e) reconstruction.
23. We are now in Phase (a), which will continue for some time yet and in which the Natural Disasters Organisation is of course playing a key role. Problems of health, evacuation, securing essential services and supplies necessary for survival in Darwin and the like are being tackled. There will be an overlap between this phase and Phase (b). Phase (b) has also begun, but will be a more protracted one. Immediate responsibility here rests principally with our colleague, the Minister for the Northern Territory, who has of course been working on the spot since the day of the cyclone.

24. There are many problems yet to be dealt with in Phases (a) and (b). These include, beyond the kinds of problems mentioned above, problems as to employment in Darwin and financial assistance for alleviation of hardship and distress which might be faced by those remaining there. For example, special arrangements might be needed to take temporarily onto the Government's payroll people losing employment in the private sector who are needed there. Consideration might also need to be given to the possibility of transferring some elements of public administration to, say, Alice Springs at least temporarily. There will be the matter of repair of Government buildings and Government-owned housing to be followed up. I shall come back to the matter of financial aid later.

25. In all of this, and in planning in relation to the later phases, we must of course have close regard to Darwin's position as a supply point and established relations between it and surrounding areas.
26. Phases (c), (d) and (e) lie in the future. They will require much organisation and planning. We have said Darwin will be rebuilt. But the concept of the new Darwin, what its size should be and the timetable all require most careful thought.

27. However, at this stage it is not too early to begin to consider what kind of planning, organisational and operational machinery will be needed for Phases (c), (d) and (e). I suggest that new machinery will certainly be needed.

Assistance to Individuals and Private Sector:

28. Clearly there will be a need to provide assistance to the private sector and to individuals remaining in Darwin.

29. The matter of employment will require early action. I suggested earlier that there will be persons in Darwin who will be unable to return (at least for some time) to their previous employment but who could be usefully employed at least temporarily on the Government payroll. Cabinet may wish the Special Minister of State and the Public Service Board to take any action necessary to facilitate the taking on of these people as temporary Australian Government employees as soon as appropriate.

30. There is the question of provision of immediate cash assistance to those remaining in Darwin - specifically, payment of the special benefit for a fortnight without means test where appropriate. Preliminary steps in this direction have already been taken and I expect that the Minister for Social Security will have something specific to put before us.
7.

31. Assistance beyond that will obviously be necessary in many cases and I suggest that the Minister for Social Security, in consultation with me as Treasurer, be asked to develop appropriate proposals. I would envisage that some form of means-testing would be appropriate and the assistance would include provision for the undertaking (where possible) of emergency repairs, but not major repairs of a long term kind, to private residences, sufficient to make them reasonably habitable and secure and for the purchase of essential items of furniture, clothing and other personal effects where these have been lost.

32. One major decision which we will need to take concerns the rebuilding of private residences. It has not been the normal practice for the Australian Government to support assistance for the rebuilding of private residences following natural disasters, the view being taken that this should be covered by insurance. However, such assistance was provided in the case of the bushfires in Tasmania in 1967, Cyclone Althea in December 1971 (but to pensioners and other people in necessitous circumstances only in that instance) and the Brisbane floods early this year.

33. It is relevant that insurance recoveries were in many cases not available in the case of the Brisbane floods (ordinary "storm and tempest policies" not covering floods) but they will be available in this case. It is, of course, not known at this stage what proportion of private residences may have been uninsured or to what extent insurance cover may fall short of present day values. It seems likely, however, that there will be considerable number of cases of
inadequate insurance recoveries, and I believe that, having regard to the precedents and the scale of the problem, we should be willing to provide assistance for the rebuilding of private residences.

34. It is clear that any assistance of this kind will have to be based on a close assessment of needs and financial resources. I suggest that the Minister for the Northern Territory, the Minister for Housing and Construction and I, after consultation with others concerned, should bring forward specific proposals on this aspect later after further examination of the various aspects involved has been possible.

35. It will be important, however, that any assistance in this direction be provided in such a way as to ensure that the rebuilding takes place in a way consistent with overall planning for reconstruction of the city. There will also be the need to follow up the question of re-building of government-owned houses.

36. Many small businesses (and possibly primary producers - the situation in that connection is not yet clear) will be facing difficulties in carrying on their operations. Loan assistance has been made available following previous disasters to primary producers and small businesses where they could not secure finance from normal sources, and such assistance may well be necessary in this case. Subject to Cabinet's approval, I will, in consultation with the Minister for the Northern Territory, be developing proposals on this aspect. Similarly, I suggest that we should be willing to provide appropriate assistance for community bodies such as churches, sporting clubs, other voluntary bodies and
9. Independent schools. Assistance for these bodies will clearly have to be on a flexible basis as individual cases arise.

37. The City of Darwin - which has responsibilities similar to local authorities in the States - will have had assets destroyed or damaged and will be in need of financial assistance for necessary repair and restoration work.

Cabinet may wish to leave it to the Minister for the Northern Territory and me to settle what assistance should be provided. Any restoration work to be undertaken by the Council will, of course, need to be consistent with overall redevelopment planning.

38. For obvious reasons, special attention will need to be paid to the particular problems which will be faced by the Aboriginal community, both in and around Darwin and in settlements dependent on it. I assume that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will be examining this matter in consultation with the Minister for the Northern Territory and the Minister for Social Security in particular.

Overall Co-ordinating Machinery:

39. Given the complexities and difficulties of the total problem, the diversity of Ministerial, departmental and other interests involved, and the obvious prospect that many decisions will need to be made expeditiously on a wide variety of matters, I suggest that a committee of Ministers - a Darwin Operation Committee - be established to perform a general co-ordinating role. Issues requiring decisions which cannot be resolved by the individual Minister or Ministers immediately concerned could be brought to this committee for determination.
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Availability of Funds:

40. At this stage, it is too early even to attempt to guess the extent of the funds that will be needed, beyond existing available appropriations, during the remainder of the current financial year to finance expenditures arising as a result of the cyclone. I leave completely aside for the moment the question of what funds will be needed beyond 30 June next.

41. As Ministers are aware the amounts available in the Advances to the Treasurer are limited and there will be many demands on these for other purposes. While emergent expenditures in respect of the Darwin operation can be met from the Advances for a time, I foresee the need for the appropriation of additional funds for such expenditures, perhaps more or less immediately Parliament re-assembles.

42. I suggest that Cabinet might now authorise the preparation and introduction of legislation for the appropriation of additional funds required as a result of the cyclone. The amount to be sought and the precise form and timing of the legislation will need to be determined later when a clearer picture of requirements has emerged.

Public Appeals:

43. Already, a considerable number of appeals for contributions from the public, both in money and kind, have been started. There will be more of these. On present indications, quite large flows of contributions will be going to the various bodies organising the appeals.
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44. The Commissioner of Taxation has issued a public statement to inform contributors and potential contributors as regards the deductibility of contributions for income tax purposes.

45. Confusion and duplication in the allocation of relief could result unless a serious effort is made to achieve at least some degree of co-ordination as between the use of public contributions to the various funds and the Government's own relief arrangements.

46. Cabinet may wish to invite the Minister for the Northern Territory and the Minister for Social Security to examine this.

Wider Economic Implications:

47. The calamity at Darwin and the efforts that will be undertaken both immediately and in the longer term will have implications for the economy at large.

48. At this stage, I do not propose to go into these in any detail. But I can illustrate the point by observing that the reconstruction of 10,000 houses would, at recent Darwin prices, cost upwards of $250,000,000. The requirements in the public works and other private investment areas will also be formidable.

49. Clearly, major issues as regards availability and mobility of resources - physical resources and not just funds - will have to be grappled with. A major effort in Darwin will have inescapable implications for our programs in other areas.
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C. SUMMARY

50. In brief, I propose that Cabinet:-

(1) confirm that the evacuation should proceed, at the
    Government’s expense and with the provision of all
    necessary resources;

(2) endorse the action already taken to provide
    immediate payment of special benefits to evacuees;

(3) endorse the proposal to provide accommodation in
    hostels, etc. free for the first fortnight;

(4) ask the Minister for Social Security, in
    consultation with other Ministers, to develop specific
    proposals for assistance for evacuees beyond the first
    fortnight;

(5) make a decision as to which Minister(s) should
    have prime responsibility for the general oversight of:
    - the movement of the evacuees
    - their welfare once they have been moved;

(6) ask the Special Minister of State and the Public
    Service Board to take any action necessary to
    facilitate the taking on of appropriate people in
    Darwin as temporary Australian Government employees;

(7) take a decision regarding payment (where appropriate)
    to those remaining in Darwin of the special, non-means
    tested benefit being paid to evacuees for the first
    fortnight (see paragraph 30);

(8) ask the Minister for Social Security, in
    consultation with me as Treasurer, to develop
    arrangements for the further assistance of those in
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13.

Darwin, including assistance for essential items of furniture, clothing etc., and for emergency repairs (not of a long term kind) to private residences;

(9) make an in-principle decision to provide assistance for the rebuilding of private residences, leaving it to the Minister for the Northern Territory, the Minister for Housing and Construction and me, in consultation with others concerned, to develop specific proposals;

(10) confirm that it would wish the Minister for the Northern Territory and me to develop, in consultation with other Ministers as appropriate, arrangements for the provision of assistance, if and as appropriate, to small businesses, primary producers, churches, independent schools, voluntary bodies and the like;

(11) confirm that it would wish the Minister for the Northern Territory and me to make arrangements for the provision of assistance to the City of Darwin;

(12) invite the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and other Ministers concerned to consult on the situation as regards Aboriginal communities in, around and dependent on Darwin;

(13) establish a relatively small committee of Ministers to be responsible for the working co-ordination of all Australian Government action in relation to Darwin;

(14) authorise the preparation of legislation to provide necessary funds to be introduced probably early in the next sittings of Parliament;
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(15) Ask the Minister for the Northern Territory and the
    Minister for Social Security to examine the matter
    of the co-ordination of public appeals;

(16) endorse the general framework I have proposed
    (paragraph 22) for the phasing of the action which
    will be necessary for the handling of the Darwin
    situation, both short and longer term;

(17) endorse the view (paragraph 27) that new machinery
    will be needed for Darwin and invite a group of a few
    Ministers to bring forward ideas as to what that should
    be;

(18) take note of the wider economic implications to which
    I have very briefly referred.

(J. F. Cairns)

28 December 1974
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FOR CABINET

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF DARWIN

PURPOSE OF SUBMISSION

The purpose of this joint Submission is to seek approval to the introduction of legislation as a matter of urgency at the forthcoming Sitting of the Parliament for the creation of a Statutory Authority to be known as the Darwin Reconstruction Commission. The Commission should have the functions of planning, development and construction associated with Darwin's reconstruction and future growth. The Commission should also be empowered to administer land, public utilities, and other assets within its control, and to coordinate public investment generally. In the legislation the Commission's powers over land use and development and its general oversight over Capital Works budgets should be spelled out.

ADVANTAGES OF THE STATUTORY AUTHORITY

2. The Government has committed itself to rebuild the City of Darwin as a matter of national priority.

3. The almost total devastation caused by Cyclone Tracy gives the reconstruction project a tenor of urgency possibly unparalleled in Australian experience.

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Because of the time scale in which substantial progress must be made in reconstruction in order to return the city to some degree of normalcy it is obvious that the normal Capital Works Procedures cannot be applied to the project.

4. Furthermore a project of this magnitude involves the interests of a number of Departments and other bodies including elected local representatives. The urgency is such that the necessary coordination in reconstruction cannot be left to the cumbersome procedure of Interdepartmental Committees. A Commission composed of appropriate interested organisations would help to overcome this difficulty. There would be provision also for a committee structure associated with the Commission, to assist in coordination.

5. Although it is not yet possible to assess the full cost of the reconstruction measures, there is no question that the expenditure by the Government will be substantial. We must ensure that in undertaking an investment of such magnitude the fullest possible opportunity is taken to remedy past mistakes in the planning and development of Darwin and the new city conforms to modern town planning and urban concepts.
6. The steps to establish order in the city, to commence the clean-up of the extensive debris, and to evacuate much of the population have already been established through the special machinery set up by this Government. The urban rehabilitation of selected major buildings and critical accommodation will obviously be necessary in order for the city to function at a reasonable minimum level during the reconstruction phase.

7. Looking beyond the immediate action we would see a priority task for the proposed Commission to advise the Government on the re-planning and restructuring of Darwin. We do not necessarily assume that Darwin should be reconstructed according to the present plan or with the existing pattern of major land uses. To achieve the objectives which we propose for the Commission it may be necessary to undertake land acquisition within the Darwin urban area.

8. We do not see these proposals as imposing a delay in the process of reconstruction that must begin but we see them as essential if the matter is to be approached in an orderly way and if the best use is to be made of the substantial public and private investment.
9. We must plan to develop a city in which buildings and services are far less vulnerable to the ravages of cyclones.

10. These objectives can best be achieved through the coordination of land use and development, building covenants and design being exercised by a single Commission with positive functions of planning, development and construction and empowered to administer land, public utilities and other assets. In this regard we have taken into account the experience of the Australian Government in relation to Canberra, Albury-Wodonga and in the establishment of regional growth centres.

11. In the normal way appointments to this proposed Reconstruction Commission should be for a fixed term e.g. five years. We are not assuming that it would have an indefinite life. Rather, its continuance should be kept under review as the city becomes progressively re-established so that the usual processes of Government, including local government, can be carried out.
LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION

12. Time has not permitted the development of a detailed brief on the legislative framework under which the Commission would operate. Subject to the proposal in this Submission receiving endorsement, details would be contained in the subsequent Submission to the Legislative Committee.

13. In the ordinary course of events, legislation relating to the establishment of growth centres under the sponsorship of the Australian Government would be the responsibility of the Minister for Urban and Regional Development. However, because of the special case of Darwin and in recognition of the special interest and responsibilities of the Minister for the Northern Territory it is considered that the Commission should be responsible to that Minister.

14. As to the composition of the Commission we envisage that it would comprise a part time Chairman, a full time Deputy Chairman and General Manager, a part time member nominated by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, a part time member nominated by the Darwin Council and three other part time members. These would be nominated by the Ministers responsible respectively for the Northern
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 Territory, Urban and Regional Development and Housing and Construction. The functions and powers of the Deputy Chairman and General Manager as the full time executive member should be spelled out in the legislation.

15. Administratively it is intended that the signatory Ministers would concur in the nominations of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and General Manager and other members and on the composition of the associated committees in order to ensure a fully balanced and coordinated structure.

16. It is recognised that the proposed new machinery will involve increased investment by the Government in administrative and professional staff but we see this as an inevitable consequence of the urban rehabilitation of Darwin. We see these additional resources as being supplementary to existing resources in the Northern Territory.

17. The task of coordination and reconstruction involves much more than the activities of the agencies of the Australian Government. The people of the Northern Territory and of Darwin must be given an adequate voice; in particular, the interest of the non-Government sector, the trade unions, business activities, and the environment groups.

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18. We propose therefore that the legislation would provide for the establishment of consultative machinery to provide channels of communication with community organisations, local government and the private sector through a committee structure. As well since it is clearly impractical to provide membership on the Commission itself for all the Australian Government agencies we see provision being made again in the committee structure to bring in the interests and activities of the associated Departments and agencies. We believe it is a major principle that the Commission itself should remain a hard-hitting structure, with limited membership.

19. Even given urgency in the introduction of legislation and the establishment of a new planning and reconstruction organisation, some months will inevitably pass before it becomes fully effective. It is obvious that a review of the basic planning and growth assumptions should commence immediately so that the Government can be advised concurrently with other matters which will be brought forward by Ministers as foreshadowed in a separate Submission from the Treasurer.
20. Accordingly, if Cabinet approves this present proposal it would be our intention to establish an Interim Planning and Reconstruction Commission with membership as for the statutory body, to commence the task of planning, managing and implementing urban reconstruction. This could involve some consideration of suspension of existing arrangements in Darwin pending major policy decisions by the Government. The Government should require existing agencies, including statutory bodies, engaged in Darwin, to cooperate with the Interim Commission.

21. Commencing at once we would want to draw on the skill and resources of the Cities Commission, the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation and the National Capital Development Commission, working with the Department of the Northern Territory in commencing the replanning process. We would envisage that the Interim Planning and Reconstruction Commission would be serviced by the Department of the Northern Territory and the Cities Commission.

RECOMMENDATION

22. It is recommended that Cabinet agree in principle to this proposal and authorise the urgent preparation of
legislation for introduction in the Autumn Session.
Cabinet might note that it would be our intention to
establish an Interim Planning and Reconstruction
Commission to commence the task of reviewing present
planning policies and identify programming for the
progressive rebuilding of the city.

REX PATTERSON
Minister for the Northern Territory.

TOM UREN
Minister for Urban and Regional Development.

29 December 1974
Telegram from Mr D J Munro to Mr J Menadue [A5931, CL1350; f. 22]

REFERENCE CABINET SUBMISSIONS NUMBERS 1518 AND 1519 AND REPORT TO THE CABINET BY THE MINISTER FOR DEFENCE DATED 29 DECEMBER 1974.

Paragraph 30 of the report of the Minister for Defence states that it will be desirable to start the disengaging/N.D.O. and that this could begin from about 3 January 1975, when control could be resumed by Ministers and their departments.

We think that a precipitate disengagement would be wrong. The press and public seem to accept that the organisation has done a good job in the emergency situation and is serving the purposes for which the government set it up. The N.D.O. should continue to operate and should only be phased out as machinery more suitable to a particular task or tasks has been established.

We support the proposal in submission No. 1519 for a Darwin reconstruction commission – with an interim planning and reconstruction commission operating until legislation has been passed. There would be an important need for close and continuing consultation between the interim commission and responsible departments. The past few days revealed the continuing need for close consultation between departments on a number of matters not covered by the mandate of the N.D.O. This requirement was met fairly successfully by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet arranging meetings with relevant departments on

(A) Immediate relief measures, and
(B) The long term issues covered by Cabinet submission No. 1518,

and direct consultations arranged between specific departments, such as transport and minerals and energy on fuel supplies.
Note from the Hon L R Johnson to Prime Minister Whitlam [A5931, CL1350; ff. 19–18]

**Prime Minister**

**From Mr. Lee Johnson**

1. Virtually every public building and every house in Darwin has been damaged or completely destroyed. Every power line has been demolished and water and sewerage services severely impaired through loss of electric power to drive the electric pumps on which they depend.

2. There are about 12,000 houses in Darwin and it is estimated that less than ½ are habitable even in a partial way.

3. The department has obtained emergency generating equipment to drive the water supply pumps and has been supplying the city mains with 1,000,000 gallons per day since immediately after the disaster. More emergency generators are now being coupled to other pumps and it is expected that we will be able to supply 6,000,000 gallons per day later today. This is all the city needs in its damaged state.

4. Sewerage depends upon the water supply and pumps to remove sewage from the collection points. The emergency generators for sewerage pumps have been obtained and are being coupled up. The sewerage system should be operational again today.

5. Power. The main power station is substantially intact and the first ½ megawatt generator should be ready by midday today. The other sets will become available progressively over the next several days. The emergency gas turbine generator will also be available by midday today giving a reliable ½ megawatt supply with back-up. The normal power demand at this time of the year is approaching 75 megawatts but with so much equipment destroyed the power we will have available over the next few days will be enough for all ordinary needs.

The power reticulation throughout the city is being restored to the important centres progressively - hospitals, food stores etc. and initial connections will be made today. Arrangements have been made with most major power supply authorities (17) in Australia for help with men, equipment and materials. Four gangs have already arrived and another 10 complete with equipment and materials are on the way.

In addition the department dispatched some stores of cabling and other materials on HMAS Melbourne and HMAS Stalwart on 26/12/74 and 27/12/74. Both ships are due here within a few days.

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6. BUILDING REPAIRS
   A large quantity of galvanised iron, Masonite, Fiber cement,
   and other building materials were loaded on the HMAS Melbourne and Stalwart.

   A complete inventory is being made of available supplies of similar materials throughout
   Australia, and there will be purchased and shipped as soon as arrangements can be made
   for storage and use in Darwin. The building labour force of Darwin is being
   mobilised today for clean-up operations and for repair to buildings which can
   be readily restored, including the Power House buildings. The department as the
   constructor of Darwin has a significant workforce of its own (1,000 staff - 2,000
   tradesmen and others) and is drawing upon all available private sector men, materials
   and equipment.

   FUNDS
   What we have done so far has been done without specific financial provision.
   However to clean up the town of the debris from buildings, trees, and motor vehicles
   we judge we need about $10 million and expect it will take 2 to 3 months
   utilising everyone who is prepared and able to work in the town. We think it is
   important that every able bodied man not required for other urgent work
   should be utilised in cleaning up the city.

   Although it is too early to guess at total damage to the city it clearly
   runs into at least $300 million and could be much more. To make a substantial
   impression on rebuilding the city we think we could need $100 million over the
   next twelve months and it can be expected to take 2 - 3 years to get the work
   substantially completed.

   GENERAL
   We think it would be wrong simply to rebuild Darwin exactly as it was and in
   the process of rebuilding we should be seeking to get a better city -
   undergrounding of power lines and better housing would be two objectives.
CABINET MINUTE
Sydney, 30 December 1974

Decision No. 3092

Submission No. 1519 — Reconstruction of the City of Darwin

Subject to the additional points recorded in paragraph 3 of this Decision, the Cabinet agreed in principle to the Ministers’ proposal, as outlined in the Submission, for the creation of a statutory authority, to be known as the Darwin Reconstruction Commission, and authorised the urgent preparation of legislation for the establishment of the Commission for introduction immediately the Parliament commences its 1975 Autumn Sittings.

2. It noted the intention to establish an Interim Commission, which it agreed should be known as the Interim Darwin Reconstruction Commission, with the same membership as the proposed statutory Commission, to commence the task of reviewing present planning policies and identify programming for the progressive rebuilding of the city.

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CONFIDENTIAL
Decision No. 3092 (cont.)

3. The Cabinet's approval of the proposal was on the basis that:

(a) the reference in the second sentence of paragraph 18 of the Submission to "Australian Government agencies" is to be read "Australian Government and Territory agencies";

(b) the Minister for the Northern Territory should review existing approvals of projects associated with the development of Darwin, including projects under examination by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Public Works, with a view to determinations being made on whether such projects should now proceed – see paragraph 20 of the Submission; and

(c) in the replanning process, the skills and resources of the Division of Building Research of the C.S.I.R.O. and of the James Cook University should be drawn upon in addition to those of the other bodies mentioned in paragraph 21 of the Submission.

4. The Cabinet asked that the draft legislation for the establishment of the Darwin Reconstruction be available for consideration at its meeting proposed for 27 or 28 January 1975.