PRESS STATEMENT

C.S.I.R.O. WOOL RESEARCH

March 8th, 1959

Today I'm going to write about wool research.

You may remember seeing some time ago a report in a Melbourne paper that the Royal Adelaide Hospital, after conducting enquiries of its own, decided that it should replace all its woollen blankets with cotton tufted blankets. The reasons for this were that the Hospital authorities felt that woollen fibres carried disease from ward to ward and from one bed to another. They felt that cotton fibres did not carry germs in anything like the same quantity.

C.S.I.R.O. immediately began research into this matter because quite clearly if this view came to be commonly held throughout hospitals, it would have a serious effect on the demand for woollen goods and could even influence some people against buying woollen clothing.

I am happy to be able to say that our Research Organization seems to have the situation well in hand. Investigations in this field have been given very high priority in the last few months.

In the last few weeks laboratory and laundry trials have been completed in collaboration with the Royal Melbourne Hospital. These trials suggest that the C.S.I.R.O. have now found a satisfactory method of washing and sterilizing all wool hospital blankets. C.S.I.R.O. recommend the use of all wool blankets instead of wool cotton union blankets on the grounds that they have higher resistance to abrasion and it is easier to remove stains from them.

They recommend also that they should be made shrink resistant so that they may withstand repeated washing. In the tests that have been held so far blankets have withstood up to forty washings and sterilizations by boiling in a special detergent mixture evolved by C.S.I.R.O.
This process reduces the danger of disease carried by wool fibres to a negligible level.

Showing the thoroughness with which they always carry out their work, C.S.I.R.O. also took a sample of air from hospital wards to analyse what kind of fibres were being carried into the air, whether they were cotton, wool or some other substance.

The analysis showed that 96% of the fibres were cotton or some form of cellulose. This shows clearly that only a very small percentage of the fibres in the air could come from woollen materials.

The C.S.I.R.O. trials and experiments in this matter have not yet been fully completed, but if later hospital trials confirm present findings, C.S.I.R.O. methods will be published in Australia and overseas with the co-operation of the Australian Wool Bureau and of the International Wool Secretariat.

As I implied earlier these findings are of the utmost importance to the wool industry because if there had been valid reasons for thinking that woollen blankets carried disease and germs more than materials of other types, it would have dealt a damaging blow to the Industry.

While I am talking about wool there are one or two other developments which may be of interest.

As you know C.S.I.R.O. evolved a process for permanent creasing woollen fabrics and this has been of greatest benefit for men's trousers and possibly also for women's skirts.

However, there has been one drawback. I understand that the plant required is relatively expensive and that there are many small manufacturers who could not stand the cost of such a plant without increasing the price of their product beyond the capacity of the market and customers they normally supply.

I feel it should be possible for some central organization, perhaps under the auspices of the Wool Bureau to establish a central plant where small manufacturers of trousers or of skirts could have their product permanently creased. The cost involved per garment on the great bulk of products would be very small.

It is true that Fletcher Jones, who are
undoubtedly the leading trouser manufacturers in Australia, have installed their own permanent creasing plant but Fletcher Jones has a very large turnover and a very large output and thus their initiative and enterprise in this field cannot be so easily followed by smaller manufacturers who perhaps supply a different market from that of Fletcher Jones.

Last week the Minister in Charge of C.S.I.R.O., Mr. Casey, told me that he would bring the question of unwanted shine on woollen suits to the notice of his officers. The C.S.I.R.O. have not, as yet, done a great deal of work on this problem, but I feel that if this defect in woollen fabrics could be overcome that wools competitive advantage over synthetics would be greatly enhanced.