In recent days the position of the Portland Wool Store has come into question. Since this store will be of vital importance to the future development of Portland I thought it may be interesting to set out the full story as it is up to the present.

You will know that the store was originally built in the latter days of the war when wool was still sold under appraisement schemes. It was in fact built as an appraisement centre. The store took many years to complete and has, in fact, never been used for its original purpose.

By the time it was completed wool was once more being sold by auction.

For several years the Department of Supply had a use for the building as a bulk store for cotton and other commodities of this kind. However, about two years ago, the Department of Supply found that it had no further use for the Portland Wool Store.

This decision immediately threw open the whole question of the future of the store. So long as it was used by the Department of Supply people had felt that when wool sales were ultimately held in Portland that the store would be made available. That would indeed have been the position because the Commonwealth is anxious to do what it can to assist the development of this important area.

However, when the Department of Supply gave up the store there was a fear that the store might be pulled down or alienated in such a way that wool sales could never be held in it. The Commonwealth did not want to hold the store idle and empty for an indefinite period because, under such circumstances, the store would deteriorate and fall into disrepair.

A little over twelve months ago a decision was originally made by the Department of Interior to sell or to lease the store. I immediately approached the Minister for the Interior regarding this building. He fully appreciates the importance of the store and was determined to do what he could within the limit of his responsibilities to see that the store was used in the best interests of Portland's development.
For this reason any intention to call tenders for the building was postponed for twelve months, that is, up to the present time. This breathing space was made so that people interested in Portland's development would have an opportunity to look around and try and find an organization that would be able to use the store for its original purpose.

Many people have been active in doing this. The Department has now reached a stage in which I think three separate people have shown an active interest in the store. The Department can't judge one between the other and, indeed, when disposing of public property it is a general rule that everyone must be given an opportunity to purchase the building and, therefore, the building will be going to tender. However, last week I sought an assurance from the Minister that when the tenders are considered the Department will give preference to any tenderer who wishes to use the store for its original purpose, that is, for wool sales. The Minister has said that he will do this.

I believe that disposal or lease of the store to a person or an organization that wants to hold its sales in Portland will certainly be in the best interests of Portland. The Commonwealth, as such, has no authority to conduct sales and, therefore, some arrangement of this kind would have to be made before sales could be held.

Recently I spoke with the Manager of the Goulburn Wool Export Co-operative Company. This Company, as you know, is responsible for breaking the woolbuyers boycott on Goulburn sales. It is a Company owned and controlled by growers of wool. It has since extended its operations to many selling centres throughout Australia, and the Manager was able to convince me that this Company had more than once prevented rings or pies keeping wool prices at artificially low levels.

I asked the Manager of Goulburn Wool Export how many bales he thought would be needed before sales could be held at Portland. He said he thought sales could be held with relatively few bales so long as the organisers were sure that there was one operator in the market, such as Goulburn Wool Export, to prevent buyer organizations destroying the sales.