Statement by the Hon. Malcolm Fraser, M.P., Federal Member for Wannon.

Malcolm Fraser, Federal Member for Wannon, said this week that a significant announcement, concerning large scale irrigation projects in Western Australia and Queensland has been made by David Fairbairn, Minister for National Development. The most important of these was the decision to go ahead with Stage 2 of the Ord River Irrigation Project. The Commonwealth share of Stage 2 will be $48 million. This will ultimately enable 170,000 acres of land in the rich Kimberley region to be irrigated. The first stage was completed in 1962 and enabled about 12,000 acres to be irrigated, which has made it possible to establish about 30 farms between 600-700 acres. In addition, a new town was built at Kunnamurra with a population of about 1,000. The first stage of the dam cost $17,000,000 in total, of which the Commonwealth provided by far the major share. Results from these trial areas have been continuously more encouraging. The main crop so far has been cotton and the average yield per acre has increased over each of the last three years. Prospects for commercial production of grain sorghum also appear to be more encouraging than they were a year or two ago.

Also, it is hoped that the irrigation of the Kimberley district will provide substantial benefits to the cattle industry. Although the Kimberleys is in a good rainfall area, most of the rain falls in a brief period of the year and for some months the food value of the normal pastures is very poor. If economic supplementary feeding of some kind can be developed the cattle industry in the Kimberleys would be revolutionised.

The Emerald Irrigation Project was submitted to the Commonwealth by the Queensland Government. This project would enable a range of crops including cotton, sorghum, wheat and lucerne to be grown under irrigation. Subject to further checks on certain aspects, the prospects for this project are sufficiently encouraging to be included in the programme. Its cost should be about $20 million.

As part of the last election platform, the Commonwealth promised to undertake a $50 million programme for the conservation of water in different states. Under this programme, submissions were to be made to the Commonwealth by the States and the $50 million was to be additional to expenditure that would normally be undertaken by the States. The first of the two projects which I have mentioned, the Ord River Irrigation Project, is to be considered as outside the National Water Resources Development Programme and regarded rather as a special northern development project. In other words, when the various projects within the orbit of the election promise are decided upon, they, together with the Ord Project, will involve a total expenditure by the Commonwealth of $98 million.