RADIO TALK BY MR MALCOLM FRASER, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
MEMBER FOR WANNON

In Canberra this week a five year agreement providing for the expansion of scientific co-operation between Australia and the United States was formally signed. As Minister for Education and Science I signed on behalf of the Government and the U.S. signatory was Dr Donald F. Hornig, Special Assistant to the U.S. President for Science and Technology, who led a high-ranking scientific mission to Australia.

Leading up to this agreement was an intensive round of discussions over a wide area of the sciences between the visiting Americans and top level Australians. The U.S. team came to Australia as a result of a decision by President Johnson and the Prime Minister, Mr Gorton, during Mr Gorton's U.S. visit last May.

The agreement states the intention of both countries to stimulate and strengthen co-operative scientific efforts. It seeks increased avenues for scientists and engineers to engage in joint research projects and to exchange information, as well as to open the way for increased exchanges of scientists. This interesting development in no way reflects on the current state of Australian-American scientific co-operation. There has been a good deal of it. There have been continuing contacts between individuals and institutions. One such field is astronomy where in recent years the results of collaboration have been demonstrated in the discoveries made by the giant radio-telescope at Parkes (New South Wales) and the development of them by optical-astronomy interpretation in institutes in the United States. And there are other fields in which an exchange of scientific results has proved rewarding for both countries.

Under the new agreement, agencies have been appointed to act as co-ordinators of joint activities and as liaison avenues - in Australia it is my own Department of Education and Science; in the United States, the National Science Foundation.

A wide range of sciences and their application to the problems of both countries are embraced in the desire for further co-operation. The agricultural sciences, for instance, receive detailed mention in the agreement. And so we look forward to further worthwhile co-operative effort in the problems of arid and semi-arid zones, which take up about three quarters of the Australian continent.

These problems deal with our rangelands, where because of the harsh climate the native vegetation is in delicate balance with the environment. These rangelands are, however, of critical importance to us because they carry about one-third of Australia's sheep and cattle and earn export income exceeding $400 million a year. And the messages of Export Week have left us in no two minds about the importance of that sort of income. The Americans have been investigating the problems of their rangelands for a long time, and now C.S.I.R.O. has established a program devoted to the preservation of these areas to ensure their continued production.

The Australian American scientific agreement covers the evaluation of soil and land potential. It covers biological methods of controlling crop and animal pests - methods which seek to replace use of pesticides which have harmful side effects to man and his environment. It seeks to provide for further co-operation in animal nutrition with special reference to trace elements - a field in which Australian science has made major advances, and where close co-operation already exists.
The agreement points to hopes for exchange of experts or information, or for joint projects, over many fields. It is intended to exchange information on the secrets of the ocean; on the study of the weather. There is a desire to speed the exchange of data on earthquakes and the ocean tides; to collaborate on the investigation of underground water supplies; on the physiology of animals and plants and diseases affecting them. A fascinating field of study where collaborative prospects exist is in the techniques of remote sensing of earth resources from aircraft, and eventually from satellites. By this means what is now painstaking and drawn-out work on the ground may become an easy, automatic task for electronic eyes and sophisticated instruments in space.

The agreement to us holds the promise of substantial benefits in the future. I know that Dr Hornig and members of his team were delighted with it.

Some correspondents have written to Federal Ministers expressing concern about lamb prices, and urging Government action against imports of the small quantities of New Zealand lamb into this country. While home consumption of lamb in the first six months of 1968 was 7½ million carcasses, imports from New Zealand totalled 37,000 carcasses - less than one half per cent share of the market. It is true that prices have fallen. But it is interesting to take a look at what has been happening in the numbers of lambs coming onto the market. Departmental figures show that a fall in price has almost invariably followed the pattern of heavily increased yardings.

This is seen quite starkly in official departmental figures covering the first eight months of the year. In this period total yardings in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide were up nearly 15% on the same period for 1967. But the impact of this increased number on the prices the producers expect to achieve may have been emphasised by the much greater yardings in particular months of this year as compared to last year. For instance, in Sydney yardings increased from just over 40,000 in August 1967 to more than 80,000 in August this year; and in Melbourne yardings rose from over 114,000 in August 1967 to more than 182,000 in August this year. A comparison of the latest monthly prices shows that in Brisbane price per lb. dressed weight fell from 22.6 cents in September 1967 to 15.3 cents in September this year. Sydney prices dropped from 24.4 cents in September 1967 to 16.3 cents last month. Melbourne prices declined from 22 cents to 13.7 cents; and in Adelaide the fall was from 22.3 cents to 14.8 cents.

The question of imports from New Zealand and their impact on the Australian market cannot now be merely looked upon as a domestic issue between Australia and New Zealand. The United States takes the great bulk of Australia's meat exports. The U.S. has a global quota of about 470,000 tons, and we supply nearly half of that. There are meat interests in the U.S. who argue against any imports at all. If we were to completely prohibit the importation of New Zealand meat we would be giving a powerful argument to the protective interests in the U.S.

In recent times a committee has been established representative of producers to maintain a constant liaison with the Department of Trade and Industry. And at the same time there are safeguards in the Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement which enable a country to take action if it can be demonstrated that imports are harming that industry. So while the government will be doing everything it can to protect the interests of local producers we must at the same time have in mind the effects that our actions could have on Australia's overseas markets.