Earlier this month I was privileged to speak at a Liberal Speakers' Group Conference along with two of my colleagues, the Treasurer, Mr Snedden, and the Minister for Labour and National Service, Mr Lynch.

As a result of my contribution to the Conference I found myself criticized in one newspaper for allegedly arguing that the Government has a limited moral obligation to help the weak and the underprivileged in the community.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact my argument was largely designed to demonstrate the kind of attitude I believe a government should adopt if it is to be able to provide the increasing welfare benefits constantly demanded by Australians today.

At the Conference I touched on what I believe should be a fundamental objective of governments. It is this which I wish to enlarge upon now, because in an election year it is most important that you should have placed before you the principles by which we in the Government, and our opponents, stand.

Australians are enterprising people. We all have aspirations for ourselves and our families, and we strive through our own efforts to achieve the goals we set ourselves. Sometimes our aims are specific - a house, a car, a certain education for our children. Often they are more general - an improvement in our quality of life, our environment, in the assistance we can give to the sick, aged and underprivileged.

A government in a free enterprise community such as ours must be in tune with these factors. It must give great attention to those areas of social responsibility in which Australians demand constant improvement. Indeed, the present Government does that, and in the last five years our spending on welfare benefits of all kinds has increased by $700 million to about $2,000 million in this financial year.
But in our desire to stress the importance a government must attach to the whole area of welfare, we should avoid the situation where a government is judged solely on the size of the increase in the welfare payments it can offer. The government should more reasonably be judged on the extent to which it provides the opportunity for individuals to prosper through their own efforts and enterprise. Personal initiative must be encouraged, not stifled, for in the long run a government cannot continue to offer improvements and increases in pensions and other such benefits unless it contributes to the general prosperity of the community by helping to create the right economic climate.

It is from the productive sector that the community draws its economic strength which is so vital if we are to achieve those personal and national goals to which I refer.

In areas such as Western Victoria, government activity towards this end is perhaps most apparent in the primary production sector. Look closely at recent government moves in the areas such as wool, meat and dairying, and you will see what I mean.

Avoiding socialist impositions, the Government has directed its attention to creating the sort of conditions under which the productive capacity of farmers and graziers can be maximised within our free enterprise framework.

You can see that principle lying behind the establishment of the Deficiency Payment Scheme and the Australian Wool Commission. As you know, under the first the Government guarantees a minimum return to wool growers of 36¢ a pound. Under the second, the Commission intervened to support the price of wool at auction. Who knows how far the price would have dropped last year had the Commission not been buying.

The recent developments in areas such as dairying - the Commonwealth’s agreement to expand the important dairy industry Research Scheme - and in meat - the 7.2% increase in export quotas to the United States - all reflect the same spirit of helping to provide the opportunity for the individual to pursue his own course. To do otherwise, to attempt to direct and determine his destiny, would be unreasonable, unwarranted and unAustralian.
If governments are to shoulder successfully the mounting burdens of social responsibility, then this can only be achieved by assisting to a maximum extent the productive sector of our community. It is on our success to achieve this that we, as a Government, should face the Community's judgement.

I cannot conclude today without referring to Anzac Day.

Today we remember those who gave their lives for their country, not only in those distant days at Gallipoli 57 years ago, but in all the conflicts in which Australians have been involved since that time.

These days, when so many of our traditional values are being called into question, Anzac Day is perhaps a suitable time for us to consider whether those values still have application to our contemporary society.

Is patriotism an outdated concept? Or the willingness to fight for freedom for our families, ourselves and our fellow men?

Thousands of Australians have died for those principles and today we remember them.

I firmly believe those principles are as valid in today's changing world as they ever were, and may the memory of those who have fallen constantly remind us of that.