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Title:

Press statement - Reply to Gorton's statements on negotiations with NSW, Vic., and
Commonwealth

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PRESS STATEMENT.

FROM: THE PREMIER (Mr. Dunstan)

19/9/70.

"Mr. Gorton's statements concerning the correspondence and negotiations between South Australia, the Commonwealth, Victoria and New South Wales concerning the River Murray Waters Agreement is a model on which one may judge his credibility.

On the 8th July I wrote to the Prime Minister requesting a meeting of himself and the Premiers of the States concerned within a month and in that letter I made it clear as Mr. Gorton has shown by his subsequent correspondence to me that I was writing in exactly the same terms to the Premiers of the other States concerned.

From the Commonwealth I received a bare acknowledgement. I did not immediately receive replies from Victoria and New South Wales and subsequently officers of my Department have telephoned the Departments of the Premiers and of the Prime Minister in order to endeavour to expedite replies. I received finally a further note from Mr. Gorton which did not reply to the substance of my letter at all.

On the 17th August, well past the date within which I had asked for a meeting, Mr. Gorton wrote and told me what I already knew from the other Premiers that he had been in touch with them and would write to me again.

I received replies in detail from the Premiers of Victoria and New South Wales in which the Premier of Victoria indicated the basis upon which he thought negotiations should proceed and a further letter from him saying that he believed that it was desirable that there should be a meeting of Premiers rather than of Ministers concerned.

Mr. Askin wrote to say that he thought there should be a meeting of Ministers and by telephone conversations it was made clear that the New South Wales Cabinet had deputed Mr. Beale to handle the whole of this matter on behalf of the New South Wales Government.

I then wrote to the Prime Minister and the Premiers concerned endeavouring to expedite a meeting and saying that I believed that each State and the Commonwealth should be represented how it wished.

Mr. Gorton then made a statement in the House saying that I had been discourteous in negotiating directly with the other Premiers although he knew from the outset that I was doing so in order to get a meeting, and saying that he had replied to me stating that he was endeavouring to arrange a meeting.

In fact at the time Mr. Gorton made that statement to the House he did not reveal the date of that reply to me - the date was the 17th September - and I had not received the reply at the time that Mr. Gorton was attacking me in the House.

I have now received a reply from Mr. Gorton in which he says that he is agreeable to a meeting and to arranging a meeting and that he has written to Mr. Askin and Sir Henry Bolte informing them of his views.

It has taken from the 8th July to the 17th September to achieve this from the Prime Minister."
