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**Title:**

Press statement - New approach on Eyre Highway sealing

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PRESS STATEMENT: 8/5/71.

Pr.D. 45/71.

FROM: THE PREMIER (MR. DUNSTAN)

SUBJECT: NEW APPROACH ON EYRE HIGHWAY SEALING.

The Premier (Mr. Dunstan) has made a new approach to the Commonwealth Government for completion of the sealing of the Eyre Highway.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. McMahon, the Premier requested a special Commonwealth Grant to enable sealing to continue uninterrupted once work on the present section from Ceduna to Penong, now being undertaken by the State, was completed.

Mr. Dunstan noted that the question of sealing the Highway had not been raised since Mr. McMahon's appointment as Prime Minister.

"In view of your stated desire to improve Commonwealth - State relations and the widespread public concern about the condition of this vital stretch of road, I hope you will be able to give the project sympathetic consideration," he said. The Premier said the State Government was deeply concerned about the rising number of accidents on the unsealed section of the road and by the economic loss to the State as a result of the Highway's shocking condition.

The text of the Premier's letter:

COPY.

M.R.T. 266/70

7th April, 1971.

Dear Mr. McMahon,

I wish to raise with you the matter of sealing the Eyre Highway between Ceduna in South Australia and the Western Australian border and to request you to consider a special grant to my State to enable this work to be completed in a reasonable time.

There have been a number of previous communications between our Governments on this subject but it has not been formally raised since your appointment as Prime Minister.

The South Australian Government is deeply concerned by the rising number of fatal accidents on this stretch of the road and also by the economic loss to South Australia as a result of the Highway's shocking condition.

In view of your stated desire to improve Commonwealth-State relations, and the widespread public concern about the condition of this vital stretch of road, I hope you will be able to give the matter sympathetic consideration.

There are several points I wish you to take into consideration. Some have been referred to in previous correspondence on this subject and some, I believe, have not.

My Government has, over a number of years, allocated very substantial resources to the progressive sealing of the South Australian section of the Highway. It has now been sealed from its junction with the Lincoln Highway, near Port Augusta, to Ceduna. This is, for practical purposes, the limit beyond which the necessary expenditure cannot be justified on the basis of normal criteria and for the domestic purposes of the State.

It is significant that only 16% of the vehicles using the unsealed section of the road are registered in South Australia, 40% are registered in Western Australia and the remaining 44% are registered in other States and Territories.

In accordance with a proposal submitted to your predecessor in January of 1967 we are proceeding with work on the section between Ceduna and Penong, a distance of 44 miles, and this is expected to be completed by January, 1973.

Also in accordance with the 1967 submission, my Government is proceeding with the survey and design work for the remaining 267 miles to the Western Australian border. We estimate that the cost of completing the work we are presently carrying out between Ceduna and Penong will be \$1.2M. and that the total cost of providing sealing from Ceduna to the Western Australian border will be approximately \$9M.

We realise that the financial resources available to Western Australia over the past few years have enabled that State to complete construction to its border. I would point out, however, that Western Australia received a proportionately larger allocation than other States in respect of the area component on the formula used as a basis for the distribution of Commonwealth Road Grants in the period preceding the current five-year agreement. No doubt this was of considerable assistance to Western Australia in allotting funds to those roads in the sparsely populated areas which demand a high level of expenditure.

In addition, we in South Australia are faced with a further difficulty in that the Eyre Highway is a proclaimed main road. We have, therefore, been precluded in the past from spending on it the so-called "40%" funds and we are currently restricted as far as Commonwealth Grants are concerned to funds allocated for Class One and Class Two roads.

I would remind you that in the current five year period South Australia is to receive only \$13.67M. in Commonwealth grants for roads in these classes and, viewed in relation to established needs, it is evident we are left with very little flexibility. To divert the funds necessary to achieve satisfactory progress on the Eyre Highway beyond Penong from other urgent rural works would create an intolerable situation.

Besides the general inadequacy of funds for essential roadworks, my difficulty in allocating sufficient money for the work required on the unsealed section of the Eyre Highway is intensified by the controls presently applying to expenditure of Commonwealth Grants and also to the inability to justify, by normally accepted criteria, diversion of funds from other urgent roadwork in more populous areas of the State.

I strongly believe that the bases on which expenditure on this section of the Highway can and should be justified are national in character, in the areas of national prestige, defence and tourism. The benefits which would be obtained are of national significance.

I therefore ask you to consider a special grant, outside normal arrangements for the financing of roadworks, to allow us to go ahead with completion of this important project at a rate which will be acceptable in the national context.

I seek your acceptance of this and, following such acceptance in principle, suggest our respective Ministers confer forthwith to resolve details and arrangements for the acceleration of this project to ensure a continuity of work following completion of Ceduna to Penong section.

Yours sincerely,

PREMIER.

The Rt. Hon. William McMahon, M.P.,  
Prime Minister,  
CANBERRA. A.C.T. 2600.

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