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Press release - Eyre Highway

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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE PREMIER, MR. DUNSTAN.

18/10/71.

EYRE HIGHWAY.

The State Government has not given up - and has no intention of doing so - in its efforts to expedite sealing of the remainder of the Eyre Highway, the Premier (Mr. Dunstan) said today.

"The Prime Minister, Mr. McMahon, has rejected our latest proposal for special assistance but we still regard this as very much a live issue.

"Work is going ahead on the section from Ceduna to Penong and urgent studies are proceeding into ways in which the remainder of the scheme might be accelerated."

The Premier was commenting on a statement by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce of South Australia on the Eyre Highway.

This contained a submission from the Elizabeth Branch, for consideration at the Federation's annual meeting this weekend criticising the "negative attitude" of the State Government.

The statement also referred to difficulty in gaining access to Mr. Dunstan to discuss the matter.

"I am at a loss to understand either the general complaint or the specific criticisms", Mr. Dunstan said.

"The Federation is simply attacking the wrong Government.

"All other State Governments in Australia have supported the view that it is beyond the resources of the South Australian Government to finance this scheme alone and that the national nature of the Highway makes it necessary for the Commonwealth Government to provide special assistance.

"This was done in the case of the Queensland beef roads which are of far less importance in a national context.

"The Federation's statement suggests that the Eyre Highway should be given a high priority for allocation of Highway funds.

"Already some \$600,000 a year over five years has been allocated to this by the State.

"If we provided more, work would have to come to a halt on other, essential parts of the rural roads programme.

Mr. Dunstan said the submission suggested using sources of funds for the project which it would be unconstitutional for a State Government to use.

"It appears that the Elizabeth Chamber in preparing its material has not done its homework".

The Premier said the Federation had made two approaches for an appointment with him. On both occasions it had proposed specific times which, because of prior engagements, he had been unable to meet.

He had, however, explained the Government's view and suggested a meeting with the Roads Minister, Mr. Virgo, for further discussions.

"I also had informal discussions with members of the Federation at their last annual meeting on this very topic. Disappointingly, an inaccurate version of these confidential discussions later appeared in the Press.

"I share the organisation's concern over the delay on the Eyre Highway. However, I object to the language of their attack and suggest that representations on this subject would be better addressed to Canberra, where its importance is not appreciated, than to my office where it is".

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