

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

FACT-FINDING SUB-COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF THE DELEGATE FOR AUSTRALIA
CONCERNING PARAGRAPH (d) OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE.

The Australian Government have been ever ready to recognize their responsibilities in respect of the needs of refugees and are sympathetic in their consideration of the problems associated with displaced persons generally.

At the Evian Conference in 1938, Australia agreed to accept a quota of refugees from Europe and until the inflow was stopped by the outbreak of war, approximately 7,000 refugees had been granted asylum in our country.

Encouraged largely by a declaration of the Government's policy on naturalization, the refugees who entered Australia in the years immediately preceding the commencement of hostilities have been almost entirely absorbed into the community. As a result of this settlement, numbers of applications have been lodged for the admission of close relatives now in European countries, who come within the categories of displaced persons and refugees. Permits have already been issued in respect of approximately 4,000 nominees in these classes.

Although few, if any, of the nominees will be able to obtain transport to Australia within the next 12 months, it is evident, nevertheless, that Australia is already making a practical contribution to the re-settlement of these people.

The Australian Government have decided to embark on a vigorous

migration scheme. A target figure of 70,000 migrants a year has been set and it is intended that a proportion of other than British subjects will be included in the scheme. It will not be practicable however, for selected migrants to travel to Australia until our obligations to those people who are entitled to rank for priority have been met, and shipping has been restored to near-normal. It will be upwards perhaps, of two years, before the way is clear to facilitate the transport and entry of non-British Europeans to Australia.

The economic situation in Australia must also be considered before any large-scale immigration plan can be put into operation. It is essential that Australian ex-Servicemen and women and those who were engaged in war-time activities should be satisfactorily rehabilitated before new settlers are encouraged. The lag in national housing must also be overtaken and additional houses provided to meet the demands of the increasing population.

Australia is a country requiring a much larger population and new healthy citizens, determined to become good Australians by adoption, will be welcomed. The Australian Government will not however, initiate any large-scale plan of immigration unless it is possible, within reasonable limits to ensure the economic future of intending migrants, and to meet the obligations to our community as outlined in the preceding paragraph.

I assure you that the Australian Government are mindful of their obligations to approach this subject from a humanitarian point of view, and will never be found lacking in this respect. The Government are fully appreciative also of the needs of these people.

For the present however, it is regretted that we are not in a position to indicate what proportion of the total number of refugees we would be prepared to accept as new settlers in our country. Apart from the considerations outlined above, we would require information as to the approximate numbers of these people; their location; state of health; occupation; age groups etc., so that we could assess their suitability for settlement in Australia, having in mind the standard of living which we would wish them to share with our own people.
