Alice Springs to Darwin Railway

Mr D.W. COLLINS to CHIEF MINISTER

At a recent meeting in Alice springs, the federal member, John Reeves, suggested that the Alice Springs to Darwin railway could be funded 30% by the NT government and then have the money claimed back through the Grants Commission. Is such a course of action tenable?

ANSWER

If that suggestion was made, it shows a decided ignorance on the part of the honourable member of another place on the operations of the Grants Commission. Unfortunately, the Grants Commission is empowered only to make recommendations to the federal government. The power of the Grants Commission is that its recommendations have so far never been ignored by any federal government. Let us hope that that situation continues, at least from the point of view of the people of the Northern Territory. It can make recommendations only in relation to recurrent expenditure and not in relation to capital expenditure. In any event, the Alice Springs to Darwin railway is beyond the scope of the Northern Territory and its constitutional powers. Railways are not amongst those powers that are vested in the Northern Territory government under the Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act of 1978. The suggestion, if it was made by the member for the Northern Territory, is one that might sound good to members of the media but does not bear examination.